Marxism Today

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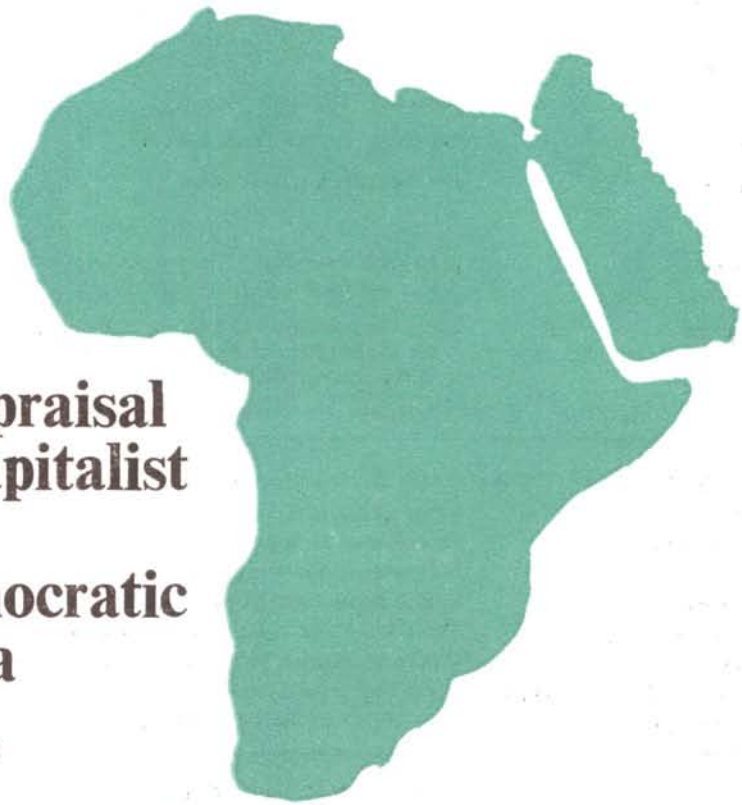
Editorial Comments

Ken Gill
Marxism and the Trade Unions

John Lewis
On the Althusser Discussion



A Critical Appraisal of the Non-Capitalist Path and the National Democratic State in Africa

Joe Slovo

Discussion

Ian Rutledge
Class Consciousness and the British Working Class

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Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

Volume 18, Number 6

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Editorial Correspondence
James Klugmann, 16 King Street, WC2E 8HY

Advertisements
Doris Allison, above address

Orders and Subscriptions
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The front cover was designed by Pat Cook.

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August 1974 — **Economic Problems of the Transition to Socialism in Britain**

Sam Aaronovitch
Phil Goodwin
James Harvey
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Editorial Comments

WE have repeatedly drawn attention in our columns to one of the most threatening trends in all capitalist countries. This is the trend to authoritarianism, to strengthened police powers, to the mounting attacks on and steady erosion of, the democratic rights of the people won by past generations in struggle.

In some countries the law—existing or newly manufactured—has been used, especially against the working-class and, its organisations, the trade unions and striking workers. This was what the Industrial Relations Act, the Counter-Inflation Act were all about.

The other side of the medal is the "blind eye", and magnanimity shown to right-wing and neo-fascist organisations in a number of countries, especially Italy, Western Germany and France.

In Western Germany this whole process has been accompanied by an escalating witch-hunt against communists, socialists and liberals in the local and federal public services, especially in education and, above all, in the Universities.[1]

Our readers may recall that over two years ago in our issue of March 1972, we reported the decision taken at a Conference of heads of Länder (Provincial) Governments against employing communists and other progressives in the public services. This has resulted in many progressive school and university teachers being dismissed and barred from appointments for which they have applied on purely political grounds. Their membership of progressive political organisations has been judged by reactionaries in the local parliaments, especially by Christian Democrats, as being "subversive" and violating the Constitution.

Unsere Zeit, the West German Communist daily—drew attention in its issue of April 20 to a number of cases of this kind in Schleswig Holstein. Four teachers, all members of the German Communist Party (DKP) were dismissed after a commission of enquiry had declared that their political outlook rendered them "unsuitable" for employment in the public service. At about the same time a member of the Social-Democratic Party and an active trade unionist called Rüdiger Offergeld—a Director of Studies at one of the Munich colleges—was dismissed by the Christian Democrat Provincial Government on political grounds. Dr. Guthler, a teacher in Hesse, is to be dismissed having been accused of "carrying on propaganda for the Social-Democratic Party". It turns out that his great crime was to use a text-book published in the GDR. A case now in the forefront of public attention in Western Germany is that of Professor Dr. Holzer, a specialist in Sociology of Communication and a member of the DKP, who has been dismissed from his University post.

All these acts are violations of the Constitution, for article 33 of the Basic Constitutional Law of Federal Germany lays it down that no-one is to be penalised on religious or political grounds.

Crowning all this is the preparation of a new law the provisions of which declare that members of organisations described by the government as "enemies of the Constitution" will be debarred from state employment. Thus the witch-hunt against progressives is now to receive the sanction of law. And all this is being undertaken by a government in which the major party is the Social-Democratic Party.

A big protest movement is developing in Western Germany organised by the *Bund demokratischer Wissenschaftler* (Association of Democratic University Teachers and Scientists). They are particularly anxious to secure expressions of protest from working-class organisations, those of students and especially of School and University teachers. Protest resolutions should be sent to the Ambassador, Embassy of the German Federal Republic, 23 Belgrave Square, London, S.W.1. and copies sent to Mr. Klaus Pickshaus, 355 Marburg, Hofstatt 18, German Federal Republic.

[1] In Western Germany the Provincial (Länder) Governments have control of Education and the local Civil Service, education coming under the Provincial Ministries of Culture.

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COMMUNISTS AND CHRISTIANS

Humanité, daily paper of the French Communist Party, devoted a whole page in five April issues to the subject of "Communists and Christians"[2]. *Humanité* reporters spoke with Christians in different areas of France, to leading Roman Catholic priests like Monseigneur Fauchet, Bishop of Troyes, Monseigneur Ancel, a Lyon Bishop (once a "worker priest"), to Monsieur Courvoisier, President of the Protestant Federation of France, to local village priests and to Roman Catholic trade unionists.

The enquiry into Christian attitudes in France brought forth all sorts of opinions ranging from enthusiastic support for Christian involvement in the "Popular Union" to doubts as to what would be the status of the Church in a socialist France. But it certainly revealed a growing desire for dialogue and, amongst many, a deep sense of need for common struggle of communists and Christians not only for better conditions now, but for a new and more just social order. The whole series of interviews forms a moving documentation.

Of course dialogue is nothing new to French communists. It is nearly 40 years since Maurice Thorez, then General Secretary of the French Communist Party, declared "we hold out our hand to you Catholics—workers, employees, artisans, peasants—because you are our brothers, burdened with the same cares as ourselves".

Last year, Georges Marchais, the present General Secretary of the CPF wrote in his book "The Democratic Challenge" (p. 139) that communists were "closer to a Christian worker than to a Voltairean banker, to a Christian partisan of peace than to an atheist capitalist living on profits from the sale of arms, closer to a Christian democrat than to a 'materialist' agent of the monopolies".

Roland Leroy, Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPF summed up the *Humanité* enquiry on April 25. He felt that it reflected something of the complexity and living richness of French society:

> "A society is not a mere geometrical figure. All the working people who, together, compose the French people are faced with urgent, burning problems, but they view them in the context of a great diversity of regional realities, cultural and religious traditions, philosophical outlooks."

The enquiry showed some important, but not uniform, changes taking place amongst French Christians, both Roman Catholic (the big majority) and Protestant. It is certainly not to the interest of believers or atheists, of Marxists or those who believe in God and Jesus Christ, to hide fundamental differences of approach with regard to religious faith. But it is the earnest desire of French Communists to work both for common struggle now for better living standards, for liberty and peace, and, at the same time to look for common ground in the fight for a new social order.

[2] *Humanité*, April 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 1974.

A SOCIALIST HEALTH SERVICE

In view of the present state of the British health service—with reorganisations, underpayment of nurses and other medical workers, budgetary economies, growing waiting lists, and competition between private practice and the public service, and between private beds and NHS beds—the model of the socialist health service long established in the Soviet Union is of extreme interest not only to health workers but to their patients (and everyone is a potential patient for the NHS). Yet while a good deal of information is available about the Soviet Health Service, nothing has hitherto been done to bring it all together.

A book of some 350 pages shortly to be published by Lawrence & Wishart—*The Soviet Health Service, a Historical and Comparative Study*, by Gordon Hyde (£6)—will therefore fill a long-felt need. The author has been engaged for some time on the compilation of this work.

This book explains the basic socialist organisation of the Soviet Health Service, its emphasis on preventive medicine, the provision of a really efficient industrial health service, the arrangements for recuperative holidays, the polyclinic system, the vast rural health service, the organisation of medical research, and the treatment of mental illness. Beyond all this, its special merit lies in its historical treatment of the way the service in its present form developed from its inception in 1918, and in the comparisons drawn on all important points with the NHS in Britain.

THE REAL FOUNDATIONS

David Craig's collection of linked essays, *The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change* (Chatto & Windus, £3.75) is one of the most stimulating books yet written on literature from a Marxist point of view. Marxism as he uses it is not a mystifying

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specialism, but a natural approach:

> "I cannot but think of each piece of literature (or each person, or house, or idea or institution, or habit, or tree or cloud), as being what it is by reason of the particular place and time at which it grows into existence and has its day." (p. 11)

By seeing literature as part of history, Craig does not mean listing general historical facts as "background", or paraphrasing philosophies contemporary with it. ("The nature of the best literature doesn't lead me to think that formal philosophy is likely to be the next most important thing to a writer after his own experience" (p. 12).) Rather does he try to read each work in its own right, with the sense of a particular place, time and class situation necessary to understand it fully. Moreover, he widens the area of what is usually studied as literature, to include not only Shakespeare and Lawrence, Wordsworth and Dickens, but also "songs of the bleak age" (workers' songs of the industrial revolution), or the working class cultural movement in the Mechanics' Institutes (in which many of the Chartists were involved) or modern Socialist writers in Germany and the Soviet Union.

One of the traps for Marxist criticism is to reduce great works of art to merely historical or ideological evidence. Craig never does this. He writes only about what interests him as living literature, and his own excitement comes across in the way he handles it. Thus his first section, "Love and Society", treats Shakespeare, D. H. Lawrence and Keats in relation to sexual freedom, and J. G. Lockhart's *Adam Blair*, the Bronte's and George Eliot in terms of "the literature of repression".

For all his sensitive appreciation of Lawrence, Craig brings out the ferociously anti-democratic, anti-socialist side of his work as well as its life-enhancing qualities. "We should feel, I believe, sorry for the man who is so driven to repudiate human togetherness" (p. 165). Again, he shrewdly demonstrates how T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* "projects an almost despairing personal depression in the guise of an impersonal picture of society", without in the least denying the originality and power of the poem.

But Craig doesn't, like so many University lecturers on "modern" literature, stop at Eliot or Yeats. Some of his most interesting points are on socialist writers like Brecht, Macdiarmid and Yevtushenko, on the "vernacular novels" of Sillitoe or Doris Lessing, and the use of colloquial speech from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* to the poems of Adrian Mitchell and the radio ballads of Charles Parker.

In short, a wonderfully rich book, with the great advantage that it will not be found too difficult by any worker with a taste for reading, or any first-year student of English in college or University. Taken with Jeremy Hawthorn's more theoretical study, *Identity and Relationship* (published last year by Lawrence & Wishart), it provides an inspiring starting point for any Communist studying literature.

Marxism and the Trade Unions

Ken Gill

(We print below the text of the Marx Memorial Lecture delivered on March 14th, 1974, at a meeting organised by the Marx Memorial Library. Ken Gill is Secretary of the Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Section (TASS) of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW). He was speaking in a personal capacity.)

I, like many others, am a trade unionist whose day-to-day work has been enhanced by some knowledge of Marxism. I try to use Marxism as a guide. In the trade union movement today as in the past, a clear understanding of economic forces is essential. Today, more than in the past, trade unionism is in the centre of the stage and the whole weight of the media is brought to bear to influence the direction which the British Labour Movement will take. Although the forms are new, the intentions are a repetition of previous attempts to mislead working people.

In 1844, trade unionism was denounced as due "to the influence of ill-intentioned agitators, demagogues, traitors, spouting idiots and ill-balanced youth . . . paid agents of the unions,

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interested in the agitation because they live upon it". The views of the ruling class do not change and even some of the expressions vary only slightly.

At the time of the Blackpool Conference of the Labour Party in October, reaction was particularly vocal when trade union delegations cast the decisive votes at the Labour Party Conference. The Press denounced the policies decided there.

The *Times* of the 25th September described the decisions as "a reversion to primitive Marxism" and the *Economist* (29.9.) said that it was "the most rigidly old-fashioned, left-wing programme". The *Sunday Times* (7.10.) indicated that it was a reversion "to the creed of Socialism it was suckled in".

These attacks prepared the way for a raging campaign when the Miners' struggle forced the Tories to hold a General Election.

The *Economist* claimed that the Marxists had taken over ASLEF, with the *Times* attacking "Communist pacemakers in the NUM", and Heath referred darkly to "Forces which are working to destroy our society by a false appeal to class loyalties".

The So-Called Conspiracy

It is obviously time to examine the facts about this alleged Marxist conspiracy.

True, it was Marx and Engels who, first in history, proclaimed on the basis of their study of the history of human society, their analysis of the mechanism by which in capitalist society the ruling class purloins surplus value created by labour, and their own participation in working class struggles—that the destiny of the modern working class is to become the ruling class itself and then to transform society by abolishing classes.

In criticising the draft programme of the German Social Democrats, Engels said it omitted a "very essential point in any programme—the organisation of the workers as a class by means of the trade unions—

> "for this is the real class organisation of the proletariat in which it carried on its daily struggle with capital, in which it trains itself, and which nowadays, even amid the worst reaction, can no longer be simply smashed."[1]

While often criticising the Liberal leaders of most trade unions of the day and encouraging those who opposed them in the unions, Marx and Engels invariably put forward their own Socialist reading of the trade unions' future, but this view was put to the whole Movement, and not as some secret conspiratorial aim.

[1] Engels—*Letter to Bebel*, March 1875.

In this honourable precedent, he was followed by generations of trade union leaders who had embraced Marxism.

Marx's remarks in his *Value Price and Profit*, which was delivered as an address to the full meeting of the General Council of the IWMA, and won unanimous approval from the trade union leaders there, dwelt on the unions fighting "effects, not the causes of these effects", and Engels often returned to this theme.

In 1866, he observed that in the *past*, springing from the spontaneous attempts of the workers to raise themselves above slave status, unions had always confined their efforts to wages and hours. "This activity of the unions is not only legitimate, it is necessary." Unconsciously, the unions at the same time were becoming centres of organisation for the working class, as the mediaeval municipalities did for the bourgeoisie.

Critically he examined the *present*—"too exclusively bent upon the local and immediate struggles with capital, the trade unions have not yet fully understood their power of acting against the system of wage slavery itself. They therefore have kept too much aloof from general social and political movements". But there were signs of change in this respect, both in Britain and in the United States of America. In the *future*, he claimed that the unions ought to learn to "act deliberately as organising centres of the working class".

As we said earlier, the concern expressed in 1973 about the results of the Labour Party Conference in itself regarded as a result of the machinations of the Left in the trade unions, was nothing compared with the hysteria surrounding the miners' dispute and the "Reds under the Beds" campaign which was the curtain-raiser for the General Election.

Mick McGahey was almost reaching the level of the fourth addition to the Trinity of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

The burden of the Heath and media arguments was that Marxists were unable to win Parliamentary power and were, by conspiracy, taking over the unions, so enabling them to exert pressure for revolution through economic levers and causing anarchy.

(The new use of the word "Marxist" as a generic term is ominous, as it was first used widely in describing Allende's Government and is the label used by the Junta in determining who is suitable for execution. Thus, the Fascists ensure that no one escapes by claiming non-membership of a Communist Party.)

Marx and Engels on Trade Unions

What were the views of Marx and Engels on the role of trade unions? They stated categorically that

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trade unions were regarded as indispensable to the working class, as was illustrated repeatedly. Pursuing the concept that trade unions were "organising centres of the working class" and marking the end of organisational spontaneity, Marx said of British unions in 1847:

> "They have not stopped at partial combinations which have no other objective than a passing strike and which disappear with it. Permanent combinations have been formed, *trade unions* which serve as ramparts for the workers in their struggles with the owners . . . (As the mass becomes united) the interests it defends become *class interests*."

If trade unions represent class interests, then we must recognise that the contradiction between class interests are embodied in the organisations themselves, regardless of attempts to involve them in spurious co-operation and so-called national interests. Yet reformists continuously thrust collaboration on us, and partial success attends their efforts.

Therefore, this reformist line needs examination. The "Gurus" of the "science" of Industrial Relations maintain a viewpoint which denies the need or advisability of a class or political view.

Allen Flanders, one of the most widely-quoted academics in the field, in his evidence to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions (The Donovan Commission), said:

> "Workers do not join unions because they think alike and share the same political outlook. They do so for the sake of gaining collective action. Their unity, that completeness of the organisation of trade unions which is the foundation of their strength, must always be imperilled when they import political faction fights. . . . What I find so objectionable as well as invalid in the Marxist view is its implicit contempt for 'pure and simple' trade unionism. Trade unions, by doggedly sticking to their immediate ends and refusing to be captured and exploited by any political party, have gradually transformed society, only not according to the sacred text or the dialectical laws. That they may be right in preferring reform to revolution and unity to discord never crosses the mind of those whose theory tells them all the answers."

This reflects an earlier but persistent Social Democrat (Fabian) view that trade unions were politically sterile and even more specifically were incapable of expressing a "class" viewpoint. After declaring that all attempts to form "general or industrial unions are foredoomed to failure", the Fabians went on (Sydney and Beatrice Webb in their earlier formulations):

> "Directly (the TUC) diverges from its narrow trade union function and expresses any opinion, either on general, social reforms or party politics, it is bound to alienate all sections of its constituents. Whether it is 'captured' by the Liberals . . . or by the Socialists . . . whether it is pledged to peasant proprietorship or to land nationalisation; whether it declares in favour of bi-metallism or the 'nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange', it equally destroys its capacity for performing its proper work and provokes a reaction which nullifies its political influence."

Connolly's View

James Connolly, on the other hand, who is recognised by all as a substantial contributor to Marxist thought, had a very different attitude. On industrial unionism, he said, in dramatic prose:

> "The power of this idea to transform the dry, detail work of trade union organisation into a constructive work of revolutionary socialism, and thus to make of the unimaginative trade unionist a potent factor in the launching of a new system of society, cannot be over-estimated. It invests the daily incidents of the class struggle with a new and beautiful meaning and presents them in their true light. The skirmishes between the two opposing armies of light and darkness in the light of this principle. . . . Every fresh shop or factory organised under its banner is a fort wrenched from the control of the capitalist class and manned with the soldiers of the Revolution, to be held by them for the workers."

He was dealing, in particular, with the creation of the new General Workers' Union of Ireland. Thus, with the advent of the Industrial and General Union structure there is a new emphasis on political aim with a class emphasis. This development coincided with the end of the doldrums following the defeat of Chartism.

The concentration of these unions on political aims are often expressed quite clearly in their aims and objects. This is true of nearly all unions and is often reflected in the Union Rules.

Union Rules Regarding Changing Society

APEX	Rule 3 (vii) To assist the members of the Union obtain democratic control over their several industries and services.
GMWU	Rule 2.4 To secure the return of members of the Union to Public Authorities, and to Parliament, providing the candidates are pledged to collective ownership, under democratic control of the means of production, distribution and exchange.
EETPU	Rule 2 (part) To improve the wages and conditions of members and to provide legal

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means to support legislative action to improve members' financial and social conditions especially by supporting policies which will ultimately give the workers ownership and control of industry.

AUEW Rule 5 (b)
To increase members' control of their industry, to co-operate in every possible way with all other organised workers in the transference of industry from private ownership to socialist and co-operative ownership for the common welfare of the people.

Ideological Struggle in the Unions

The ideological struggle in the trade union movement is in no way different from that which takes place in the whole working class.

It is the fight between Marx's view that:

> "If trade unions have become indispensable for the guerilla fight between capital and labour, they are even more important as organised bodies to promote the abolition of the very system of wage labour."

and the view expressed by Flanders, which occupies the ring of the trade union movement.

Flanders' statement that by sticking to "immediate ends" society is gradually transformed has to be examined. It is a widely held view in leading trade and Labour Party circles.

Firstly, the transformation of society is not abundantly evident in the crisis-ridden capitalist world. Britain, especially suffers from raging inflation, growing unemployment, monetary crises, fluctuations in output, and pools of poverty entirely out of harmony with our technological and industrial potential.

Trade unions, struggling to exist within capitalism, have been powerful enough to resist the attacks upon them. In their pursuit of *immediate* ends, they have been subjected to *political* attack. Where employers have been unable to break their resistance, *politically*-designed laws, drawing heavily on corporatist examples from Fascist countries, have been employed. Trade union response, despite the attempts to blunt it, has been *political* in essence. Belief in "class" transcends formal attachment to law.

The trade union struggle on the Industrial Relations Act, refusal to attend Court, AUEW counter-punches after fines, the release of the Pentonville Five, and the campaign against the wage control laws, have been from the beginning political in essence and class based. The lead in the struggle has been consistently Marxist, in the recognition of the law as class law and the organisation of mass involvement.

The crisis in British capitalism and the response from the movement by the unions and through the unions to the Labour Party has been influenced by a Marxist analysis of society and a Marxist assessment of the role of the working class.

The New Situation

While Britain fulfilled the role of the dominant power, maintaining international law and order in the interests of capitalism, while it could enforce regulation of the movement of goods and force less developed countries to provide cheap raw materials and energy, it was possible to maintain a relationship with the trade union movement which enabled Morgan Phillips to claim that British Socialism owed more to Methodism than to Marxism, and Harold Wilson to claim that "We can get no help from the man in Highgate Cemetery". Those days are over.

The recent Miners' strike underlined the impossibility of separating politics and economic struggles. The determination of the Miners' struggle and their refusal to accept calls for national unity, patriotic duty, etc., was strengthened by the ideological leadership provided by Marxists and by the acceptance by the miners of the reality of class struggle. Advice to accommodate by the "Moderate" Frank Smith, was rejected so firmly that even the Gutter Press had to abandon him.

The extension of the day-to-day economic struggle by trade unions to a fight which has political objectives is represented in everyday terms by the growth of opposition to a workers' own boss to opposition to the whole boss class. That is basically what Marxist understanding means.

This extension of ideology would achieve the level of unity necessary to allow the class to force fundamental changes. Such an attack would be unstoppable.

It is the similarity to this massive move within the miners' struggle which lifted that strike to national proportions. One employer faced 250,000 workers in one industry. Thus workers without a qualitative change in ideology produced conditions similar to a small general strike, or to a class attack on one employer. The numbers involved compare with a strike at the General Electric Company, or one against the Engineering Employers' Federation. The level of understanding needed, would, however be much greater.

The State and Heath understood the class role of the miners' core of resistance to capitalism. The phenomenon was recognised with its potential and a furious but unsuccessful attempt was made to crush it.

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Flanders, while referring to his doubtful "transformation of society", also argues for economist demands provided by "those who prefer reform to revolution". One lesson has been taught by the miners' struggle which points to other previous struggles. How far would the reformist leadership have gone in winning even the *reform* of mining conditions without the influence and pressure provided by those who regard the role of the working class to be the change of society? Judged by their own criteria reformist policies fail. They do not produce reform!

Thus, Marxism ensures economic advance and reform while those who reject the need for revolutionary change do not even maintain conditions for which trade unions were designed.

Trade Unions and Political Parties

The conspiracy theories so popular before the Election are designed to prove to workers that those workers who espouse Marxism are unreliable. It is also intended to show that trade unions are being manipulated by political opportunists.

It is important to understand that Marxists do not confuse trade unions with political parties. Trade unions are as Marx said, "organising centres of the working class". The fact that Marxists know that trade unions can and will play a part in changing society is not in any way a confusion of roles. One can say with confidence that the working class will play a role—that does not mean that the class is a political party.

As trade unions in Britain defined their political ambitions and as they created the Labour Party in an attempt to mould society in a workers' image, so trade unions will continue to reflect the ideological ambitions and shifts of the working class against the background of prevailing economic conditions.

Thus, the attacks on militants and Reds in the 1940s and 1950s when British capitalism was expanding, were effective, while the same vicious material was unsuccessful in 1974.

Thus, the Marxist analysis of society shows that the economic base not only determines the ruling ideology, but affects in detail what is possible in working class organisations at a specific time.

It is significant therefore, that the witch-hunt was ineffective. It is significant that when the Parliamentary Labour Party was partially involved in condemnation of Mick McGahey, the uproar of condemnation from the Labour Movement of the signatories, was more weighty than the demands from the Tories for explanation from those who did not sign.

We now have a Labour Government which confounded the pollsters by being elected on a programme which contained more than an element of Marxist influence, not imported from outside, but from within the Labour Movement. That influence is in a continuous and continuing British tradition from Marx and men like Ernest Jones, Chartist leader, contemporary and comrade of Marx.

The role of the trade unions still will be the subject of struggle and debate.

If reformism prevails the unions will be expected to confine their activities to wages and conditions.

This demand which will be made, will be totally impossible in today's conditions. Today's circumstances do not allow that flexibility.

The State and the Trade Unions

The intervention by the State on the side of monopoly capitalist employers in both Labour and Tory Governments was not initiated by an abstract reactionary theory, but by the economic pressures on contemporary capitalism.

The drive for higher profits in a failing economy which suffers from a low level of investment only leaves the workers as the logical target. To increase exploitation of British workers it is necessary to impose policies by force of law. That can only be done by destroying the trade unions' capacity to fight as "In Place of Strife", the Industrial Relations Act, or by controlling wages as in the Counter Inflation Act.

Marxists will continue to use their influence in the trade union movement and on society generally to stop either of these eventualities. They will continue to underline the inevitability of fundamental clashes between the conflicting interests. They will need to point out that equilibrium is not possible, and that a Labour Government cannot simply refrain from attacking the workers. It must, if it is not to attack the working class, begin the offensive against monopoly capitalist interests.

Thus, while the trade unions must play a supporting role to a Labour Government, its class loyalties must determine its relations with a government. Here, the analysis first formulated by Marx becomes clearly valid. It is not enough to fight the effects. The working class must deal with the causes.

What is certain is that wider sections of our people affected by objective conditions like unemployment, inflation, will refuse to accept the desperate ruling class solutions.

The success which attends the actions of the working class organised in trade unions will largely determine how quickly we can bring about what the Grand National Consolidated Union in 1834 declared as its objective.

(completed on p. 174)

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On the Althusser Discussion

John Lewis

(We print below some concluding remarks by John Lewis on the discussion on the philosophical writing of comrade Louis Althusser which took place in Marxism Today *during 1972-1973. We hope to publish in a subsequent issue of* Marxism Today *some remarks by Louis Althusser on this discussion. We are not, meanwhile, reopening the general discussion.)*

The discussion that has followed my two articles in January and February 1972, and Louis Althusser's *Reply* has revealed a fundamental divergence of approach of considerable importance. On the one hand we have what Althusser sees as the "structural" approach by which basic principles are abstracted from social and economic experience and built into a logical system. This scientific theory is then available for the Party to use as its instrument and weapon. On the other hand we have the more concrete approach of Marx and Lenin, for whom theory or understanding is inseparable from action. This gives us not a system but a logic of situation. We see the dialectic not as an unfolding of the Idea, but as the actual conflict between opposing elements in the unity to be resolved by the passing of the present phase and the emergence of the new stage that is coming into being. As Marx says:

> "We do not set ourselves opposite the world with a doctrinaire principle, saying 'here is the truth, kneel down here!' It is out of the world's own principles that we develop for it new principles. Instead we show the world why it struggles, and this realisation it must come to whether it likes it or not."[1]

Thus our insight, going beyond what *appears*—the empirical facts, challenges bourgeois laws, principles and even the reality as it seems to them, and becomes the awareness and consciousness of a class moving to the assumption of political power.

Dialectic is not a logical process based on the concept, but an historical, revolutionary movement of real people, in a concrete situation, *coming to the understanding of that historical situation* and taking the necessary action which follows. Thus, as Marx said, we cease to "explain" the world and its contradictions, we *change* it, and overcome them; we *transcend*, go beyond, the system which involves them. That is the historic role of the working class and the basis of the class struggle.

This being the position I stand for it appears a little odd when Althusser opens his reply with the complaint I am unconcerned with politics and the class struggle.

This involvement of the dialectic with the daily struggle, this inseparability from the concrete is not something found only in the mature Marx. On the contrary Marx never took the dialectic to be the logical process of the unfolding of the Idea as Hegel did. Even in 1844, before he wrote the *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts*, he sees the dialectic as the working class becoming conscious of the contradictions and frustrations of the capitalist system, of their role in necessary change, of the political struggle it demanded, and speaks of the working class:

> "emancipating itself and attaining universal domination; proceeding to emancipate society as a whole, thus adding to the revolutionary energy and consciousness of its own position its identification within society as a whole, as its deliverer."[2]

This does not look to me the words of a young Hegelian idealist who is living in the cloudy world of logical abstractions from which it has to break away to discover the real world of class struggle and politics!

From the first, Marx sets out not from "pure Idea" but from "real active men, on the basis of their real life processes". His premises he says "are not abstractions, they are real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live". This is the spirit which informs in particular his studies of economic exploitation in the *Manuscripts* of 1844, while his explicit rejection of Hegelian abstractions occupies a central position in the *Critiques* of Hegel's Theory of the State and of his *Phenomenology*[3] (1844). In the words of Engels, "He showed us the way out of the labyrinth of 'systems' to a real positive knowledge of the world."[4] Historically Marxism demonstrates the culmination of the sequence of class societies culminating in a classless socialism, a society whose economy is "carried on by a free

[1] Marx—*Correspondence of 1843.*

[2] Marx—*Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844).

[3] Marx's *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a whole* (1844).

[4] Engels, *Feuerbach*, p. 25.

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association of producers under their own conscious purpose and control".

The Althusser System

Althusser rejects both the humanism of this approach and its historicism, regarding both as representing the Hegelian idealism which Marx eventually discarded. "Theoretical Anti-humanism" we have already dealt with; by "historicism" he means an immanent dialectical principle unfolding in the course of the development of society. This is a view that some Marxists, notably Kautsky, have held and still hold, but Marx repudiated any such overall philosophy of history as a misguided attempt:

> to metamorphose (his) historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into an historico-philosophical theory of the general path imposed by fate on all peoples.[5]

Althusser rejects Marx's own theory as set forth in the Preface to the *Critique*, in *The German Ideology*, and in *Capital*, of the historical progress of society, and he rejects also Marx's belief that it is men who are the makers of history.

His own theory is non-historical.

It is independent of any law of motion of capitalism.

It is independent of the activity of the subject man.

It is *value free*, as the natural sciences are held to be, for it is not concerned with man's growing power to control nature to satisfy human needs.

It avoids the ideological distortion of *negation*, whether of human personality under capitalism, or eventually the negation of that negation when capitalism gives place to socialism.

Finally it rejects the dialectic of society as a unity developing within itself. There is no such unity, there is only a collection of independent and autonomous factors—economic, institutional, and ideological giving rise unpredictably to the moment at which "overdetermination" brings about a transformation within the structure of society.

Althusser therefore rejects what he regards as the Hegelian concepts of

> "negation, fission, alienation, opposites . . . negation of negation, supersession (*Aufhebung*) etc. The whole of the Hegelian dialectic is here."[6]

When Marx says that he has "inverted" Hegel, says Althusser, all that he does is to convert these concepts into a mythology operating unconsciously in history. This system of errors, Althusser argues, Marx discovered to be false, rejected entirely with the false philosophy (ideology) which supported it, and came over to the purely scientific understanding of society we find in *Capital*.

> "He at last discovered the reality of the ideological opacity which had blinded him; he realised that he could no longer project German myths on foreign realities."[7]

This is a distortion of Marx's thought at this or any later stage. These concepts appear from the first in a material not an ideological and conceptual form; nor are they rejected, but persist through the whole development of Marx's thought—which however *is* a development: that is to say they are enriched and more completely explained and expanded, but still constitute in their material form the basis of effective Marxism today.

Marx and Hegelian Concepts

We proceed to clarify Marx's *real* inversion of the Hegelian concepts, which he finds of immense and lasting importance when translated into material terms. He sees Hegel as:

> "the first to expound the general forms of (the dialectical) movement in a comprehensive and fully conscious way. . . . It supplies a positive understanding of the existing state of things, it at the same time furnishes an understanding of the negation of the state of things, and enables us to recognise that that state of things will inevitably break up. . . . It is in its very nature critical and revolutionary."[8]

1. **Man:** Marx defines the "essence" of man not in idealistic terms but simply as man as constituted by his relations with other men—a "nature" therefore being changed and developed as man learns to control nature in new ways, and creates new forms of social co-operation. As Lucien Sève puts it:

> "once human nature has been endowed with the qualities of concrete historicity, it becomes possible to avoid the abstractions and fixity of theological or purely logical conceptualism."[9]

Marx's Conception of History

2. **History:** Marx explicitly rejects the conception of history ascribed to him by Althusser, and regards it as made by man in the series of technological systems each of which itself requires an economic, institutional and cultural form of its own. This is summed up thus in the Preface to the *Critique:*

[5] Marx-Engels *Correspondence*, No. 167 (1877).
[6] Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 197.
[7] Althusser: *For Marx*, p. 82.
[8] Marx: *Preface to the Second Edition of Capital*, 1872.
[9] Lucien Sève. *Marxism and the Theory of Personality.*

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> "In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite (economic) relations. . . . The mode of production materially determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. . . . At a certain stage of their development, the material forms of production come in conflict with the existing relations of production . . . then comes the period of social revolution with the change of the economic foundations the entire superstructure is more of less rapidly transformed."

This is the theory of history, which Althusser declares "has caused havoc in the working class movement",[10] and which Lenin never accepted. If he had done so, says Althusser, the Russian Revolution would never have taken place. As I pointed out in my articles, Lenin *did* accept it. *He quoted it in full* in several of his basic treatises. In his reply Althusser failed to justify his statement although it is clearly contradicted by the facts which are well known to all.

This summary of Marx's position in the *Preface to the Critique* which is further elaborated (as so short a formulation needs must be) in the *German Ideology* and the *Grundrisse,* contains all the basic principles that Althusser rejects: *alienation, negation,* the *negation of the negation,* and *transcendence.*

Marx on Alienation

Thus Hegel's *alienation* of human existence is seen by Marx as the fate of man under capitalism, which negates personality and freedom and reduces him to a commodity, the sport of the economic laws of the market economy. This is alienation, and it is economic and not conceptual as it was for Hegel. *Negation* is obstruction and frustration of the process of production and the satisfaction of human needs owing to the developing contradictions of capitalism. This negation is itself negated by the transition to socialism; but while for Hegel this was essentially a higher level of consciousness, a further development of the concept (expressed of course in history), for Marx it was one thing only—the material and historical emancipation of man through revolutionary activity. This is the *"transcendence"* of the present condition, of "all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being:" and this is Marx's teaching both in 1843, and in 1873, and in 1883, both in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, The German Ideology,* and *Capital.* And it is not merely the words that are the same but the reality—the exploitation, and the emancipation.

As Sève so well puts it, Marx always has a concrete reference for every one of these conceptions, they are never idealistic and abstract, never merely conceptual or ideological.

> "the concrete reality of alienation takes the form of man's depersonalised subjection to the laws of the market."[11]

This is also the basic theme of *Capital,* and

> "repeats *word for word* the description of alienation in the *Manuscripts of 1844.* It now has the full explanation in relation to the extraction of surplus value and the fetishism of commodities, going deeper into the reality so convincingly depicted earlier."[12]

It is no longer possible to argue that the *Manuscripts of 1844* treat man as a pure concept and enmeshed in purely philosophical abstractions and that this mistake has to be overcome and rejected by scientific realism, when in fact Marx in these essays is wholly concerned with economic and material conditions of man's exploitation, with descriptions of how wage labour exploits and degrades the worker. This is developed in the following sections of the treatise: (I) Wages, (II) The Profit of Capital, (III) The Accumulation of Capital, (IV) Competition, (V) The Power of Money, etc., etc.

The reality of man's emancipation from the iron laws of the market and their reduction of his humanity to a commodity to be bought and sold, is the theme not only of the *Manuscripts of 1844* but also of all Marx's subsequent works including *Capital;* but here while the term alienation is replaced with the fetishism of commodities, the conception remains indentical. The alienation and subsequent emancipation of man constitutes the basis of Marx's life work:

> If Marxism is stripped of its concern for man in society, man emancipated from the "depersonalisation of capitalism" and its economic laws and the exclusion of the concept of man, and as a consequence of any theoretical treatment of the relation between the mode of production and real men, then it is the class struggle and Marxism in its entirety which becomes quite incomprehensible.[14]

Althusser constantly declares that from 1857 onwards there is not a trace of such Hegelian concepts as "alienation". Unfortunately it is precisely in the 1857 *Grundrisse,* only the Introduction of which seems to be familiar to him, that the theme of alienation is most fully developed, the very term appearing some 300 times. Here too the basic theme is humanism:

[10] Althusser, *Reading Capital.*

[11] Lucien Sève—*Marxism and the Theory of Personality.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[14] Sève, *op. cit.*

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> When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is the wealth, if not of the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc. of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What, if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature—those of his own nature as well as those of so-called nature? What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any presuppositions other than antecedent historical evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any *previously established* yardstick—an end in itself? What is this, if not a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?[15]

The Dialectics of Social Change

Althusser's "structural Marxism" regards change as "transformations" within the basic structure of society resulting from what he calls "over-determination". This takes the place of the kind of dialectical change described in the Preface (which we have just mentioned) and further elaborated in *The German Ideology*. Contradictions appear within the structure because of the independence of the autonomous processes and their interaction. There is no determination by the basic contradiction of the relations of production and the forces of production.

A wide range of circumstances are operative which are not part of any such contradiction.

Althusser rejects Engels' view that in the last resort it is the economic factor that controls the issue. The assembly of interacting facts cannot be generalised and the result cannot be foreseen.

This reminds us of Lenin's warning to take into account the accidental factors on the one hand and on the other the essential auxiliary developments which create or prevent revolution.[16] But for him the *necessary* conditions were always secondary to the *sufficient* cause. The difference is important. It is *necessary* to be at least 18 before you can enter a university, but unfortunately it is not a sufficient condition for entry. The essential thing is to qualify academically. When we come to revolutionary change in society you may pile up the *necessary* conditions, the auxiliary facts, to the greatest extent, but if the limits for economic expansion and for the full utilisation of resources has not been reached, there will be no revolution. "No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which it has room have developed." Society has realised that the capitalist model has already moved beyond the point at which this *structure* can serve as an adequate theoretical model for the mode of production. Historical reality transcends the capitalist structural reality, and revolutionary change is now possible and necessary.

It is not therefore simply a matter of a parallel series of events, independent of each other, accidentally and simultaneously reaching the exact point of development which precipitates a "transformation". "Transformation", note, for the structure is preserved or enriched by the interplay of its transformation, *which never yields results external to the system.*

Meaning and Practice

It is a generally accepted principle that no hypothesis is acceptable unless it is capable of being tested by experiment or further observation; and no theory can be regarded as valid beyond the limits of such tests. In Marxism the same rule has always prevailed; there is no theory that is not "the eye of practice", and that is not subject therefore to the constant revision which its use makes necessary.

But Marx goes even farther. There is always the danger of theory standing over against practice even if the intention is to apply it. This danger arises from the old dualism of mind and matter, of mental work and physical work, of subject and object, which Marx overcomes in the conception of the thinking body, in which matter and mind go together, in the union of mental and physical labour, and the combination of theory and practice which he calls *praxis*. What this means is that theory is always considered as a programme for action; and no action is viable that is not based on Marxist understanding of the concrete situation. Practice then becomes a concrete union of thought and reality.

This is not the method of Althusser. Theory becomes "a process of knowledge which takes place entirely in thought";[17] it gives no direct understanding of the current situation, no scientific strategy, and "ceases to be a developing and determining guide to political practice". When Althusser speaks of "theoretical practice" he does not mean applying theory in practice, but going on theorising, practising theorising as one practices logic. There is no test in practice in the scientific way. "Theoretical practice is its own criterion, as for mathematics".[18] The criterion "lies wholly within the coherence and self sufficiency of the theory itself". So it might be argued is the validity of theological theory based upon the criteria pro-

[15] Marx *Grundrisse*, *Pre-capitalist Formations*, p. 86.

[16] Lenin: *Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, Book I, p. 224. Book II, p. 53.

[17] Althusser, *Reading Capital*, p. 56.

[18] *Loc. cit.*, p. 59.

Althusser seems unaware that mathematicians no longer believe that the foundation theories of mathematics are unquestionable.

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duced by theological practice. This is, plainly speaking, the typical justification for a mythology. It will not do. The traditionally Marxist distinction and opposition of "practice" and "theory" becomes obviously pointless if "practice" means just going on theorising in a vacuum. Yet Althusser seems never to have noticed that for Marxism it is the test of practice, the test of applying theory in action, that has been from the first unquestionable.

If Marxism is scientific that *means* that it is not a speculative theory resting on its own plausibility, but a programme for action, and therefore under continuous test. Its meaning cannot rest within its own self-justifying system. Meaning is revealed only in application in what a theory makes of the situation, of the facts it purports to explain. The sum of the practical consequences which result from it in practice constitutes the entire meaning of every theory.

If we turn to Marxism, in the first place it is not "a difficult philosophy". It is, as Marx says, "the discovery of the self-criticism which is in the things themselves". "The conscious, systematic complement of experience". "The real movement which abolishes the present state of things".

> "As history develops, and with it the struggle of the proletariat becomes more clearly defined, they have no longer any need to seek for such a science in their own minds. They have only to give an account of what passes before their eyes and to make that their medium".[19]

Althusser's "Marxism" is very much "a science in his own mind".

Social Change and Social Consciousness

Althusser sees this theory as the possession of the Party as an elite, thus enabling it to exercise power on behalf of the workers. In fact, the workers will even at that stage, Althusser says, be under the domination of the ideology of capitalism; for ideologies, from Althusser's point of view, are not the expression of the fundamental class structure and class domination, but autonomous and parallel, and therefore continuing. The workers therefore will persist in clinging to religion and to individualism, and even under socialism need to be *controlled* by the enlightened ruling Party.

Marxism on the contrary sees radical change depending on the changed political consciousness of wider and wider circles of the working class; the role of the Party being to create this new consciousness for which there is always in the working class a *potential*, while the bourgeoisie, as a class, have their potential consciousness limited to that of bourgeois ideology and the permanence and finality of existing class relations and existing economic law.

Man and History

The working class must grasp its own philosophy. If not, it will inevitably absorb that of the capitalist class and this will fatally obstruct its understanding, and render its class consciousness inoperative. This is precisely what Marx meant by the working class becoming philosophical and the revolutionary dialectic enlightening them and becoming a material force.

> "History does nothing, it wages no battles. It is *man*, real living man, that does all that, that struggles; history is not something apart using man as a means for its own particular aim, history is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his aims."[20]

What then is the motive force of social change? Althusser says—"the struggle" itself; surely it is the *reason* for struggle that matters. It is the raising of instinctive class consciousness to consciousness of the actual historical position of the working class of its real interests, in other words a penetration of class consciousness by theory. *It is the determination to end alienation, to set free from fetters* the developed forces of production from their ownership by a class concerned only with financial profit, *to transcend*, to go beyond the capitalist phase of history.

> "To overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being. . . ."[21]

> "to . . . to create the conditions in which it is possible for man to be truly human."[22]

Freedom and Necessity

Althusser's "Reply" and the issues raised by Goldstick and others relate to the question of determinism and freedom. It is assumed that there can be no alternative to natural law determining every issue, to which law we submit, finding our freedom is acquiescence in what *must* happen—as in social issues, in doing so "giving history a shove". Any assertion of "freedom" is at once taken to be an attempt to act independently of objective forces, or by sheer will power (voluntarism) *make* what we want come to be. When we assert that on the basis of knowledge we can act effectively whereas if we remain in ignorance we are under the blind control of events,

[19] Marx: *The Poverty of Philosophy*.

[20] Marx, *The Holy Family*, (Moscow 1956), p. 156.

[21] Marx, *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, tr, Bottomore, *Karl Marx, Early Writings* (1963), p. 52.

[22] Marx, *The Holy Family*, p. 176.

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and that this is freedom, we are accused of setting science aside, of being voluntaristic existentialists.

The simple fact is that the antithesis is not between scientific fact and freedom but between *compulsion* and freedom. If scientific law operates without our understanding we are helpless. If we *know* these laws we are no longer under external compulsion. We may use them; or we may discover how to escape them, as when a doctor explains how to escape infection by vaccination or other means. Freedom is not *absolute*. We are not saying that by sheer *will power* and regardless of conditions we can *make* anything we desire come true. This is the "existentialist" freedom which Althusser and Goldstick attribute to all of us who insist that the coming of socialism is dependent upon "the will, the consciousness and the purpose of men" (Marx). Marxism declares that no law of history operates by itself, or merely *compels* our assent. It requires and depends upon our understanding, on the decisions, the will, of the organised working class. It demands the overthrow of class ownership and therefore a fierce political struggle. No-one ignores either the struggle or the political outcome, but it depends on understanding, on the enlightenment of the working class. Marx's whole emphasis is on this awakening to comprehension of the historical process in which the working class is involved and which confronts it today with its destiny.

History is not made by the dialectic, or by contradiction, or by struggle, or by economics, or by an immanent law of development, but by a theoretically clarified class consciousness, and, when conditions are ripe, the resulting revolutionary action. Marx describes this as philosophy finding its material weapon in the proletariat, and the proletariat finding its intellectual weapon in philosophy.

It is here that a profound disagreement among Marxists appears between those who rely on the laws of history, *independent of our understanding and will,* to sweep society irresistibly forward to the inevitable transition to socialism, and are therefore content to see the consciousness of the working class rising instinctively to the point of revolution; and, on the other hand, those who see the working class as inheriting, embodying and realising the revolutionary dialectic of Hegel, which is essentially the transformation of the instinctive into the comprehending, a class consciousness enlightened by theory. Both Marx and Lenin saw clearly that the real driving force was not unconscious natural law, with which we irresistably identify ourselves, but the realisation of the transitory nature of existing society and its laws (an essentially Hegelian conception), and the role of the workers in overthrowing them. Lenin believed that this level of consciousness could not be realised by relying on instinctive class consciousness, hence the indispensable role of the vanguard, not to replace the working class but to increase its class consciousness by enlightenment and simultaneous action.

Knowledge on the Basis of Freedom

There is no freedom so long as the life process of society retains "its veil of mystery". Determinism remains so long as men are blind to the historical change which is taking place.

Yet Althusser is convinced that anyone who says that "Man makes his own history" can only be an Existentialist and a disciple of Sartre. But for Sartre the creative act is a blind choice. For Marx it must be based on the objective demands of the situation, which for Sartre would be determinism not freedom; moreover it is the considered act of the class whose historic destiny it is to seize power and establish socialism. To accuse those who see man as the creator of his own history as he increases his understanding and control of nature, and, as he develops the forces of production, creates and changes the pattern of social relations (that is the economic and social system), of "existentialism", is really a piece of gratuitous nonsense.

The mistake of the determinist is to see no difference between being compelled by outside forces, and being convinced by natural inquiry of the sensible thing to do. They are quite different. Freedom for Althusser, and for Goldstick, appears to be a decision based on no objective grounds at all. To have reasons, for them is to be determined by the conditions we have come to understand. Marx says:

> "Men make their own history, but not just as they please. They do not choose the circumstances for themselves but have to work upon circumstances as they find them."[23]

And that is freedom; while not to *know*, not to *choose*, is to act—condemning men to suffer the compulsion of uncontrolled historical forces.

If the laws of economics and history operate independently of ourselves, there is no freedom for us other than surrendering to the irresistible tide of history. This is not the meaning of the phrase "Freedom is the knowledge of necessity!" What it really means is that you are only free if you have discovered by your own intelligence what is really happening. That we are at the crossroads of history, that the opportunity and the possibility of emancipation and progress are before us, and *we have to seize it.* But history will not move forward unless we have the intelligence to understand and

[23] Marx: *The 18th Brumaire.*

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the courage as well. There is no compulsion to take this step. To take it is wholly the responsibility of every individual and of the workers as a class. Neither is there any inevitability of dialectical law to carry the thing through in spite of us and apart from us. The upshot, as Marx said was:

> "Either the revolutionary reconstitution of society or the common ruin of the contending classes."[24]

Does Consciousness Reflect or Change the World?

Consciousness does not merely accept its world and the lessons of its educators. It educates its educators and changes the very order that confronts it. It is knowledge that calls for revolutionary action, knowledge as understanding of the actual situation because it is the knowledge of the proletariat, whose conditions vitally affect that knowledge so that it sees differently and more clearly than the existing ruling class. It is understanding of the critical position of the workers; a matter of life or death. It is knowledge that sees *why* its world must be changed and *how* it must be changed, that points not to acceptance of the status quo but its transcendence. Like the knowledge of a doctor who knows the defective condition of his patient and also the treatment that will take him beyond his present state. Above all it is knowledge that is inseparable from action, knowledge that at one and the same time knows the world and changes what is known. It is action that effects change in its object, and therefore calls for a fresh understanding of the facts; and then for further action. This is the dialectic of knowledge and action that Marx calls praxis. It is, for us, primarily social knowledge. It is diagnostic, critical, redirective, recreative, and restorative. In a word it is revolutionary.

For the modern proletariat it is the dialectic of the development of capitalism through contradictions to the transcendence of its alienating, paralysing "fetishism of commodities", the laws of the market, by the revolutionary action of the working class.

But this is not automatic and inevitable, but depends wholly on knowledge, decision, and the associated action as its indispensable motive force. Theory must evolve an adequate interpretation of the world before it will be able to change it. If, however, it is effective as a theory it abolishes itself as pure theory reflecting reality as it begins to determine the shaping of new reality.

Traditional philosophy, and Althusser is traditional in just this way, presupposes a certain distance between reality and its theoretical interpretation—the "system" of Marxist thought. But Marxism sees this distance overcome in

> "the unfolding of the moments of actuality which is the essence of dialectical cognition."[25]

Theory ceases to be reflective of reality and turns into energy acting upon reality. But this cannot happen until the working class has developed far enough to comprehend its situation adequately:

> "The reform of consciousness means nothing else than that we acquaint the world with its consciousness which is not clear to itself, that we wake it up from the dream it is dreaming about itself, that we explain to the world the nature of its own actions.
>
> Our slogan must be: a reform of consciousness not through dogmas but through an analysis of mystical consciousness which is unclear to itself, be it religious or political. Only then will it be discovered that the world had long been in possession of this dream about something which can be realised once the world is conscious of it. It will then be ultimately discovered that mankind does not set out about a new task, but realises consciously its old one."[26]

Praxis means for Marx both a tool for changing the course of history and a plan of historical evaluation for the reshaping of conditions. The social content of this way of knowing becomes self-evident if it is consistently followed. Praxis revolutionises existing reality through human action. Of course the arm of criticism cannot replace the criticism of arms.

> "Material force can only be overthrown by material force, but theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses."[27]

[24] *The Communist Manifesto.*

[25] Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, Collected Works, Vol. 38, p. 158.

[26] Part of a letter probably intended for Ruge, and published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in 1844. Translated by Easton and Guddat, *Writings of the Young Marx*, pp. 203-15, and also by S. Avineri in *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* p. 138.

[27] Marx, *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Tr. Bottomore, *Karl Marx, Early Writings*, p. 52.

(*continued from p. 167*)

> "The bringing about of a different order of things in which the really useful and intelligent part of society only shall have the direction of its affairs."

That embryonic class organisation admirably defined its aim. Marx was able to explain the mechanics of capitalist society and consequently point the way to remedy its destructive effects.

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Discussion Contributions on:

A Critical Appraisal of the Non-capitalist Path and the National Democratic State in Africa

Joe Slovo

(The author is a prominent South African revolutionary. He is writing in a personal capacity.)

For Africa there is perhaps no area of Marxist study in greater need of theoretical elaboration and analysis than the one surrounding the choice of a road for development. Marxists of course do not require convincing that in Africa, as elsewhere, a socialist order is the only just and rational aim, and in this broad sense the word 'choice' presents little difficulty. But when immediate tactics must be considered, the questions (all interrelated) come crowding in.

Does the existing socio-economic base make practical the idea of a socialist order as an immediate perspective? If, compared with the industrial capitalist West, class crystallisation of the two historical antagonists in the struggle for socialism—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—is still in its formative state, which social force or combination of social forces will pave the way for radical advance to the higher order? What is the special role and character of the state in a situation in which class crystallisation is still inchoate, and in which it is difficult to point to any single class strong and cohesive enough to mould society in its own image? To what extent does the external factor (the world socialist and capitalist sectors) facilitate in the one case and make difficult in the other, a shorter route from predominantly pre-capitalist formations in Africa to socialism? Is it consistent to say at one and the same time that objective conditions for an immediate leap to a socialist order are absent and yet that it is possible for all the countries to by-pass capitalism? If so, what is the character of the transitional political form which can steer such a course successfully? Above all, what is the nature and role of the class struggle during such transitional periods and in particular what independent part is to be played by the emergent working class in the different phases of these periods?

The elaboration of tactics towards the eventual establishment of a socialist order in any given region is the province of indigenous Marxists working in their own specific political and economic situation. There are, however, a number of basic and interrelated postulates which have a more general relevance. Broadly stated these are: that the construction of socialism pre-supposes the existence of a relatively advanced modern industrial base; that a new state form must be won which will ensure social control of the means of production; that such a state cannot be won except in struggle against external and internal forces whose economic and social interests will impel them to resist the transformation; that such a struggle can only be successfully led by a revolutionary political vanguard guided by scientific socialism; and that none of these objects can be lastingly achieved without overcoming the dependence on the world capitalist economy.

Although these propositions are rarely disputed, much formulation in the discussion on the concept of a non-capitalist path tends to underplay one or other of them and reveals an internal inconsistency with the Marxist doctrine of by-passing capitalism on which the discussion is premised.

All are agreed that in the developing countries of Africa the immediate post-independence socio-economic structure was a hybrid one. Side by side with elements of the early stages of capitalism there co-existed pre-capitalist modes of production and social relations. The majority of the people were operating within the sphere of pre-capitalist formations; but the economy of the colony as a whole was, to a greater or lesser degree, moulded or used to serve imperial needs so that in one sense the pre-capitalist sectors had a link with the local or world capitalist markets which continued into the post-independence period. Engels states:

> "The revolution which modern socialism strives to achieve is, briefly, the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, and the establishment of a new organisation of society by the destruction of all class distinctions. This requires not only a proletariat that carries out this revolution, but also a bourgeoisie in whose hands the productive forces of

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> society have developed so far that they allow of the final destruction of class distinctions. . . . Only at a certain level of development of the productive forces of society, an even very high level for our modern conditions, does it become possible to raise production to such an extent that the abolition of class distinctions can be a real progress, can be lasting without bringing about stagnation or even decline in the mode of social production."[1]

Social formations rarely appear in their pure form. The use by Engels of the words "even a very high level for modern conditions" underlines the difficulty of quantifying the specific level of development which makes a society 'ripe' for an advance to a higher order. But rough as my description of Africa's developing countries may be, it enables us to conclude that in general the internal factors do not on their own correspond with the classical prerequisites for an advance to socialism which the founders of Marxism had in mind. Therefore, the question of a relatively early socialist perspective for Africa involves a consideration of the concept of by-passing capitalism in Marxist theory. This is of relevance to those situations in which capitalist production relations may already exist side by side with pre-capitalist forms but in which the capitalist mode of production is not yet dominant and the development of the productive forces, and with them the social forces, have not yet attained the level referred to by Engels. The fact that even the pre-capitalist sectors may have a connection with the market economy does not, in itself, warrant the conclusion that the capitalist mode of production is already dominant, as suggested by A. G. Frank.[2]

Marx and Engels on By-passing Capitalism

Marx and Engels devoted their researches mainly to the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe and demonstrated the inexorable tendencies for capitalist property to transform itself into social property because capitalism has "itself created the elements of the new economic order by giving the greatest impulse at once to the productive forces of social labour and to the integral development of every individual producer".[3]

Marx was careful to make clear that this proposition does not imply that all nations are inevitably doomed to experience capitalism's 'pitiless laws', or that he was advancing "an historico-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself".[4] In what historical circumstances could people move from predominantly pre-capitalist societies to socialist ones? A number of theoretical speculations were posed by the classical Marxist writers, and the 20th century has witnessed a few instances where people living under pre-capitalist patriarchal forms have been integrated into a socialist structure.

Both Marx and Engels dealt with the question intermittently, when their advice was sought by the incipient Narodnik movement in Tsarist Russia. The

[1] F. Engels, 'On Social Relations in Russia', *Marx-Engels Selected Works*, Volume 2 (3-volume edition) p. 387.

[2] Frank's thesis is that the structure as a whole in the underdeveloped and dependent world is essentially capitalist with a simultaneous generation of underdevelopment in some of its parts and of economic development in others. ". . . the capitalist system effectively penetrated even the apparently most isolated sectors of the underdeveloped world and their very underdeveloped state is as much a product of capitalist penetration as the more modern sectors. The so called backward or feudal domestic areas of an underdeveloped country are no less the product of the single historical process of capitalist development than are the so called capitalist institutions of the supposedly more progressive areas." *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Socialist Revolution*, Monthly Review Press 1969 p. 5. See also *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, Monthly Review Press 1967. If correct this neat and dove-tailing model would seem to dispose of the whole problem of by-passing capitalism since most of the third world is in any case 'essentially capitalist'. But it is one thing to demonstrate that even the pre-capitalist sectors have a link with the market economy (which is the position even in countries like Mozambique and Guine-Bissau) and quite another to characterise the economy as essentially capitalist. The latter proposition has meaning in Marxism only when it can be demonstrated that the mode of production, the relations of production and the property relationship which are at their foundation conform to a determinate pattern. Laclau has dealt very tellingly with this aspect of Frank's thesis in *Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America*, N.L.R. No. 67, 1971 p.19.

Drawing on the Frank thesis, Issa Shivjee (Tanzania, *The Class Struggle Continues*, Discussion paper for Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 1972 p. 14-16) claims that "The capitalist relations in fact constitute the *dominant* mode of production" (in Africa). His contention is based on the claim that "the nature of the class holding power is . . . decisive in categorising a particular mode of production" and that in every African country including Tanzania "the ruling class are objectively serving the international capitalist system, notwithstanding the moves to disengage from it". His own stimulating analysis of Tanzania demonstrates that these statements are gross over-simplifications. In any case the fact that countries like, say, the oil kingdoms serve the international capitalist system is only one amongst a number of other (perhaps more important) indices of whether they can be regarded as capitalist, feudal or semi-feudal states.

[3] Marx to *Otechestvenniye*, November 1877, Marx-Engels *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers, p. 312.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 313.

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Narodniks were concerned with whether the remains of communal peasant ownership could serve as a starting point for a popular movement which would leap over the entire capitalist period, and transform Russian peasant communism instantly into a modern socialist system owning communally all the means of production, and enriched with the technical achievements of the capitalist era. Can Russia, asked Marx, ". . . without undergoing the torments of the (capitalist) system secure all its fruits, while developing her own historical endowments?"[5]

Marx and Engels hinted that it was theoretically conceivable that the Russian commune, if it were not further undermined by the advance of capitalism, could move from its communal base (avoiding the intermediate stage of bourgeois small scale ownership) to a higher socialist form. "But," said Engels, "this could only occur if before the complete break up of communal ownership a proletarian revolution is successfully carried out in Western Europe, creating for the Russian peasants the pre-conditions requisite for such a transition."[6]

This was not to be. The expected proletarian revolution in the West did not take place, and meanwhile, the disintegration of the commune had advanced considerably. The early uncertainties which marked Marx's reflections on this question[7] were overtaken by events and after his death Engels more emphatically discouraged Narodnik thinking on this question. Russia, he said, could not by-pass capitalism which was a necessary "historical evil which nevertheless brought compensating historical progress". Of the peasant commune Engels said "I am afraid that the institution is doomed".[8]

Lenin's Contribution

Lenin's early writings did not suffer from any ambiguities on this question. With typical fullsome verve he weighed into "Narodnik illusions and anarchist gibberish" which claimed that "Russia, for instance, can by-pass capitalist development, escape from capitalism or skip it in some way other than that of class struggle on the basis and within the framework of this same capitalism". He laid down the much broader propositions that "Marxism teaches us that at a certain stage of its development a society which is based on commodity production and has commercial intercourse with civilised capitalist nations must inevitably take the road of capitalism", and that "in Russia the working class suffers not so much from capitalism but from the insufficient development of capitalism".[9]

In the article *Democracy and Narodism in China*, Lenin praised the sincerity and democratic enthusiasm which was evident from "every sentence of Sun Yat Sen's platform" yet described him as a "petty bourgeois socialist reactionary". This because he, like the Russian Narodniks, was holding out the possibility that "capitalism can be 'prevented' in China and that 'social revolution' there will be made easier by the country's backwardness". Lenin pointed to the inconsistency of Sun Yat Sen's 'socialist dreams' with his plan for radical agrarian reforms (land nationalisation and the break-up of feudal estates) which was not only possible under capitalism but "represents the purest, most consistent and ideally perfect capitalism".[10]

Even in relation to the newly created soviet workers' state, Lenin was at pains to emphasise that the term Socialist Soviet Republic implies the determination of the Soviet Government to achieve the transition to socialism and "not that the present order is a socialist order". The move towards building socialism in Soviet Russia as a whole demanded transitional and intermediate forms because it was a country in which there intermingled different types of socio-economic formations, including pre-capitalist ones which, together with small commodity production, predominated. Only six years before the October Revolution, Lenin described Russia as "one of the most benighted, medieval and shamefully backward of Asian countries".[11] To lay the material basis for a socialist order, even within the framework of a political dictatorship of the proletariat, it was necessary to utilise elements of capitalism (even to stimulate its controlled growth) and to direct it into channels of state capitalism as a method of increasing the productive forces in the political control of a workers' regime.[12]

It is important to note that in the context of post-October Russia the concept of by-passing capitalism as an historic stage (using selectively nevertheless

[5] Engels quoting Marx in *Afterword to the Work on Social Relations in Russia*, Marx-Engels *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 401.

[6] *Ibid*, p. 395. See also extract from Preface to the new Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto quoted in Marx-Engels *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 404.

[7] Marx wrote three long drafts of a reply to Vera Zasulich in an attempt to clarify his views on this question, but eventually did not send the letter. The first draft appears in Marx-Engels *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 152. Instead he sent a short and rather open-ended answer which appears in Marx-Engels *Selected Correspondence*, p. 339.

[8] Engels to N. F. Danielson, October 17, 1893, Marx-Engels *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 464-5.

[9] *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, Progress Publishers, p. 49.

[10] *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, pp .166-7.

[11] *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, p. 164.

[12] *The Tax in Kind*, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2 (two volumes edition) Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1947, p. 702, 713, 718.

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some of its economic forms to lay a basis for socialism) was neither theoretically nor practically conceivable without a dictatorship of the working class. In the absence of this, both agrarian reform (short of socialist collectivisation, which is the end product and rarely the beginning of the process) and the encouragement of state capitalist forms, would undoubtedly generate capitalism economically and politically. This point has a vital bearing on what has been described as the national democratic state in Africa, and the nature of the class struggle there to which I shall return.

In regard to those areas of post-October Russia which were *completely* dominated by patriarchal pre-capitalist forms (such as Bashkiria, Uzbekistan, etc.) I find myself in absolute agreement with Iskenderov, who criticises the "occasional attempts" by analysts to apply this experience to the liberated countries of Asia and Africa.

> "forgetting that in the case of these peoples social development took place within the framework of a single state and single economic system under the direction of a single Marxist-Leninist party at the helm of the government. It is one thing to bring a backward people up to the level of advanced peoples within a single state and quite another to effect the transition of countries thousands of miles away from the states of the socialist system and existing in entirely different social conditions. Unfortunately these basic differences have not always been taken into account."[13]

The Comintern Discussions

The first systematic attempt to elaborate some guiding theoretical principles on the question in relation to the colonial world was made at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920. In the commission on the national and colonial question, a lively debate took place on whether and to what extent the Communist International and the communist parties should support the broad national movements in the colonial world. The main adversaries in the debate were Lenin, who drafted the main thesis, and the Indian communist leader M. N. Roy. Roy, in a supplementary thesis, counterposed the movement of the workers and peasants to that of the national liberation movements and argued for the rejection of Lenin's proposition that communist parties should help and work with national liberation movements in Eastern countries.[14]

In relation to India, Roy maintained that "the masses were not infected with the national spirit" and that the revolutionary movement had nothing in common with the national liberation movement. In the result it was Lenin's view which prevailed, although, influenced by the argument about the unreliability of the social forces leading most of the national liberation movements and their growing rapprochement with the bourgeoisie of the exploiting countries, he agreed to amend his draft thesis by substituting the term 'national revolutionary' for the term 'bourgeois democratic' to describe those national movements with whom alliances would advance the workers cause:

> "The significance of this change is that we as communists, should and will support bourgeois liberation movements in the colonies only when they are genuinely revolutionary, and when their exponents do not hinder our work of educating and organising in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited."[15]

Thus whatever alliances were created it would be the duty of the Communist International "under all circumstances (to) uphold the independence of the proletarian movement *even if it is in its most embryonic form.*" (my emphasis)[16]

The Comintern met at a time when a successful workers' revolutionary sweep was expected to spread to most of the advanced countries of Western Europe. Indeed doubt was expressed as to whether, without such a spread, workers' power in Russia could itself long survive. It was against this broad perspective that Lenin's main thesis held out the possibility of a relatively immediate transformation in the colonial countries. These countries could emerge from their present stage of development when the victorious proletariat of the Soviet Republics was in a position to give them support and to extend a helping hand to the "working masses." In the meanwhile, it was the duty of communist parties and of elements prepared to form communist parties "everywhere to conduct propaganda in favour of peasants' soviets and of working people's soviets, this to include backward and colonial countries. Wherever conditions permit, they should at once make attempts to set up soviets of working people".[17] The thesis then turned to the question of whether these backward colonial countries could by-pass capitalism:

> "The question was posed as follows: Are we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward nations now on the road to emancipation

[13] *The Third World*, Progress Publishing House, Moscow, 1970. p. 185.

[14] The polemic on this question at the Second Congress of the Comintern is summarised by G. Adhikari in *Marxist Miscellany* 1, 1970, Peoples Publishing House, Bombay, India.

[15] Lenin, Report of the Commission on The National and Colonial Question, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 242.

[16] Lenin, *Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p. 150.

[17] Lenin, *Report of Commission*, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

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> and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war? We replied in the negative. If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, and the soviet Governments come to their aid with all the means at their disposal—in that event it will be mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development. Not only should we create independent contingents of fighters and party organisations in the colonies and the backward countries, not only at once launch propaganda for the organisation of peasants' soviets and strive to adapt them to the pre-capitalist conditions, but the communist international should advance the proposition, *with the appropriate theoretical grounding*, that with the aid of the proletariat in the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage." (my emphasis)[18]

This projection which, it must be emphasised, still needed an "appropriate theoretical grounding" stood in contrast to Lenin's above-quoted unequivocal condemnations of the Russian and Chinese Narodniks, who had advanced the possibility in a different form and in quite a different historical context. It partially echoed the tentative comments by Marx and Engels to the effect that insofar as any possibility existed of by-passing capitalism in 19th century Russia it was wholly dependent on the success of a proletarian revolution in the West. But Lenin added a new dimension: the creation of soviets as organs of power suitably adapted to the conditions of a pre-capitalist social system. It was thus not the remains of a pre-capitalist communal system (as in the earlier discussion) which provided one of the foundations for avoiding capitalism, but the success and the strength of proletarian power internationally and the emergence of suitably adapted soviet-type organs in the backward areas. In the event neither of these conditions ripened.

It was at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 that the actual term 'non-capitalist road' was used for the first time, and this only in the general discussion. Attention was drawn by O. W. Kuusinen to the fact that there had been "no opportunity to make a serious enough study of the question" in order to accomplish the very important theoretical task set by Lenin namely that of "producing the theoretical substantiation of the possibility of non-capitalist development in the backward countries".[19] Opinions at the Congress differed although there appears to have been wide support for the speakers who maintained that the 'road' was still feasible only where there was no indigenous bourgeoisie or indigenous bourgeois regime, and that it was certainly out of the question for countries like India and China which were passing through the bourgeois democratic stage of their revolutions.[20] That portion of the main thesis of the Sixth Comintern Congress which dealt with the colonies in effect reverted to Roy's 1920 contention that the issue in almost all the colonies was 'class against class', and that one of the chief tasks of the newly created communist parties was to expose the reactionary role of the national bourgeoisie and the 'national reformist character' of the national movements.[21]

Summary of Pre-1960 Approach

When the 81 parties met at the World Conference in 1960 the substantiation of the theoretical framework which Lenin had considered necessary 40 years earlier was still lacking, and this area of Marxist doctrine was still in a most under-developed condition. A number of propositions (at least on my interpretation) seem common cause in the earlier attempts to elaborate the problem and it is useful at this stage to summarise them.

(1) In general both the material conditions which make possible the socialist transformation, and the connected growth of social forces capable of leading the struggle for a new society and directing it along socialist lines, emerge and are created only under capitalism.

(2) In the absence of such a social and material base the prospect of by-passing capitalism and advancing to socialism is vitally bound up with a combination of special internal and external factors. In specific situations in the past it became feasible to project the theoretical possibility of a country or a group of countries by-passing capitalism in circumstances

> (a) where, in a country without an advanced capitalist industrial base, and in which communal forms of production still remain intact, a revolutionary upsurge could facilitate the move from archaic forms of communalism to socialist collectivisation. This *may* have been the position at one point in the second half of the 19th century in Tsarist Russia. *But this possibility was in any case made entirely dependent on a successful workers' take-over in the advanced capitalist countries, which would create the material and political preconditions requisite for such an advance.*
>
> (b) where, as in the early twenties, the collapse

[18] *Ibid.* p. 244.

[19] *VI Kongress Kominterna* Records, Issue No. 4, Moscow Leningrad, 1929, p. 6.

[20] The debate is referred to briefly by Iskenderov in *The Third World, op. cit.*, p. 176-7.

[21] Mohit Sen, *Marxist Miscellany, op. cit.*; see also R. Palme Dutt, *The International*, 1964, Lawrence & Wishart, p. 209.

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of capitalism in all or most of the advanced capitalist countries was considered imminent. In such event, in the colonially dominated world struggling against imperialism, the creation of peasants' and workers' organs of power—soviets suitably adapted to the pre-capitalist social and economic base—could, with the massive material and political help of the victorious proletariat in the advanced countries, provide a foundation for a move towards socialism. It was implicit in this assumption that the overwhelming victory of world socialism would result in such weakening of imperialism that external resistance to an immediate socialist orientation would not be an insuperable obstacle. Massive aid would help to break the dependence of the colonial areas on the world capitalist market and economy.

(c) where, within the borders of a single state ruled by the working class, there are backward feudal or semi-feudal regimes, they can for obvious reasons be steered into the mainstream of a socialist economy of the country as a whole. This in fact happened in the case of Uzbekistan, etc., and in Mongolia which, although a separate state, comes close to this case because of its geographic contiguity to the Soviet Union which made possible a uniquely intimate economic and political relationship with the socialist state. With some variations the same could be said about some other countries which took the socialist road without a well-developed modern industrial and social base.

The essence of the problem which in Lenin's words needs a theoretical substantiation was not the abstract one (which had been partially answered by history) of whether or not all peoples are fated to tread the same path through a capitalist economic order *of the classic West European type*. In this sense almost every single socialist country in the world has by-passed capitalism and the fact that most of them did so by the toleration and even the controlled encouragement of capitalist forms for short periods, does not contradict that general proposition. What needed theoretical (and practical?) grounding was the question of whether in a backward pre-capitalist country organs of power could be created with a determination to build socialism, and which could rely on sufficient help from existing socialist countries to enable them to survive and create the foundation on which socialism could be built. It is worth reminding ourselves of what Lenin actually said: "The communist international should advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries *can go over to the soviet system and, through certain stages of development*, to communism without having to pass through the capitalist stage." (my emphasis)

'*Can go over to the soviet system*'—that concept, certainly in the twenties, was seen as the first condition to make possible planned transitional stages; without this precondition a choice of path as between capitalism and socialism was regarded neither as practical nor relevant. That is why the issues that dominated discussions in the twenties were: the absolute need to maintain the independence of the working class movement, the relationship between the working class parties (existing and in embryo) and the national movement, and the task of creating mass organisations and setting up soviets suitably adapted to the concrete conditions but clearly dominated or guided by working class parties.

What then is the relevance of all this for today?

The 1960 World Conference

The 1960 statement of the 81 parties uses the formulation 'non-capitalist development' in relation to the newly independent areas; the first time that this term actually appears in any document of the international communist movement. The relevant paragraph reads:

> "After winning political independence the people seek solutions to the social problems raised by life and to the problems of reinforcing national independence. Different classes and parties offer different solutions. Which course of development to choose is the internal affair of the peoples themselves. As social contradictions grow the national bourgeoisie inclines more and more to compromising with domestic reaction and imperialism. The people, however, begin to see that the best way to abolish age-long backwardness and improve their living standard is that of non-capitalist development. Only thus can the peoples free themselves from exploitation, poverty and hunger. The working class and the broad peasant masses will play the leading part in solving this basic social problem."[22]

A lot of verbal heat has been generated about the suitability of the term 'non-capitalism' to describe even a transitional social system. It inevitably evokes the obvious question: if it's not capitalism what then is it? The negative nature of the term opens the way for an unending Talmudic type debate on the categorisation of state forms, economic formations, etc. which are, so to say, neither fish nor fowl. I shall return to this when I deal with a few of the states in Africa which have from time to time been described as taking the non-capitalist path.

[22] *Statement of the 81 Communist and Workers Parties*, December 1960, published in *The African Communist*, No. 4, 1961, p. 4.

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I believe that the above paragraph meant no more than that the newly independent states are not fated historically to go through the full development of capitalism, and that eventually, as a result of the intensification of internal social contradictions, 'the working class and broad peasant masses' will play the primary part in leading the people to a society free of exploitation. It should be emphasised that the document makes no claim about the immediate possibility of the emergence in those areas of worker and peasant dominated power structures able to begin creating conditions for socialism. Such power structures were what provided the basis for a planned advance towards socialism in all the existing socialist states, almost all of whom avoided to a greater or lesser degree the classic historical route via Western type capitalism. And it was the expectation in the early 20's that soviets could be created which made feasible the idea of an analogous process in the colonies.

What the document does say about the immediate possibilities appears in a later paragraph:

> "In the present situation, favourable domestic and international conditions arise in many countries for the establishment of an independent national democracy, that is, a state which consistently upholds its political and economic independence, fights against imperialism and its military blocs, against military bases on its territory; a state which fights against the new forms of colonialism and the penetration of imperialist capital; a state which rejects dictatorial and despotic methods of government; a state in which the people are ensured broad democratic rights and freedom (freedom of speech, press, assembly demonstrations, establishment of political parties and of social organisations), the opportunity to work for the enactment of an agrarian reform and other democratic and social changes, and for participation in shaping government policy. The formation and consolidation of national democracies enables the countries concerned to make rapid social progress and play an active part in the people's struggle for peace, against the aggressive policies of the imperialist camp, for the complete abolition of colonial oppression."[23]

Unfortunately, a source of much uncertainty and even confusion in some of the discussions since the document was adopted has been the blurring of an important distinction: that between the problem of by-passing capitalism, and the possibilities of building a progressive national democratic state in the post-independence period because of the 'favourable domestic and international conditions'. In the long term there is, of course, a dialectical interconnection between the two problems in the sense that the implementation of the targets set for a national democratic state will result in material and social progress, and more-or-less favourable conditions for struggle by those forces—basically workers and peasants—without whose state hegemony the completion of the anti-colonial revolution and the eventual creation of a socialist order is not possible.

[23] *Ibid.*

The National Democratic State

But the distinction I emphasise is of great importance. On the face of it the programme for a national democratic state is not inconsistent with the creation of a relatively progressive capitalist democracy pure and simple. It can indeed become the framework within which capitalism flowers. Upholding political and economic independence, rejecting military bases, fighting against being recolonised and dominated by foreign capital, rejecting despotic and dictatorial methods of government, ensuring broad democratic political rights and other democratic and social changes—these aims are all consistent with the less moribund stages of bourgeois democracy. Agrarian reform usually implies a redistribution of the land, the break-up of feudal and semi-feudal estates or even land nationalisation. It is a catalyst for the creation and multiplication of petty peasant proprietors producing for the market. But it does not necessarily mean socialist development; if anything, it generates small capitalists and petty bourgeois modes of social organisation and petty bourgeois ideology.

> "Even the redistribution of the whole of the land in favour of the peasants and in accordance with their desires will not destroy capitalism at all but will, on the contrary, give an impetus to its development."[24]

The creation of state sectors in order to make progress towards setting up a national industry also does not bar capitalism. It can, and in most cases does, become a "peculiar midwife of capitalist relations" and can serve to stimulate capitalist relations via state forms of capitalism.[25] The economic measures which are considered necessary to tackle the immediate post-independence task of creating a national industry and advancing the productive forces will, by and large, fertilise and reinforce tendencies towards capitalist rather than socialist development—especially when it is conceded that the young states (whatever path they have proclaimed) remain within the sphere of the world capitalist economy, which restricts both internal and external powers of manoeuvre. For the socialist world is still unable to provide all their development

[24] Lenin, *Two Tactics*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[25] K. Brutens, *Neo-Colonialism and its Socio-Economic Strategy*, Kommunist No. 4, 1970, translated and published by *Daily Review*, Novosti Press Agency, April 23, 1970.

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needs on the scale implicit in the 1920 thesis.[26] "The countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America cannot, of course, count that the socialist countries are able to supply all their needs for capital, equipment and technical aid. They have to meet part of their demand through imperialist countries. However, owing to the support of the international system of socialism they can act as an independent and equal partner."[27] (Surely, a most unrealistic expectation which has been negatived by events.)

On the face of it, therefore, the implementation of the social measures which inform the concept of national democratic states tells us very little more than that a further step has been taken to advance the anti-colonial and anti-feudal revolution; a step which no doubt constitutes an historic advance,[28] but which lacks one of the basic ingredients to enable the society to steer even a transitional course towards socialism—the ingredient of workers' power. Without this ingredient there is no reason founded either in theory or experience for us to conclude that the national democratic state is itself a tool or instrument for the avoidance of capitalism, whatever other historically retrogressive formations it may serve to undermine. Yet in much of the writing on this question, that is precisely the status which is accorded to the national democratic state. Here is but one fairly typical example of some of the expositions by Marxist analysts on the question:

> ". . . the state of national democracy is a transitional form of administration. The mission of this state is to pave the way for transition from pre-capitalist relations to socialism, by-passing the stage of capitalist development. Its political groundwork is the united national democratic front comprising all national democratic and progressive forces. The structure of the state of national democracy is determined by its class basis. Essentially and objectively this state is *from the very beginning* (my emphasis) the democratic dictatorship of the revolutionary bloc of the proletariat, peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie. The state of national democracy cannot fulfil its mission without transcending the framework of bourgeois democracy. A revolutionary anti-imperialist, anti-feudal state of the working people, it is to accomplish the transition to non-capitalist development and the transfer of the revolution by several stages to socialist revolution."[29]

It is clear from this and many other references to the question that, however transitional it may be, the national democratic state is regarded as something more than a structure reflecting the immediate post-independence situation. As a state form it appears to have already within it the seeds of a future socialist society. Though the process of transformation may eventually involve a number of phases, in the course of tackling the national democratic aims of the current phase the state is seen as laying the socio-economic basis for a transition to a socialist order, and moving closer to the situation from where it can proceed to construct it. The 'mission' of the national democratic state is brought closer to fulfilment as it more and more "transcends the framework of a bourgeois democracy":

> "As the national democracy develops through revolution and evolution the state will gradually mould the society, creating the conditions for a step by step transition to a society in which socialist production relations will predominate."[30]

If this formulation means that the post-independent state forms will eventually be replaced by a different state form under the control of workers and peasants which will in turn begin building socialist production relations, then it cannot be disputed. In this sense the special significance of the national democratic state is simply that within it conditions become more favourable for the working people to prosecute the class struggle. But the debate on the question goes far beyond this, and in a way which reinforces Iskenderov's assertion that "it would be premature to consider all the aspects of this complex problem fully clarified and scientifically substantiated".[31]

Perhaps the most important problem is centred around the question: How is it envisaged that the national democratic state will transcend the frame-

[26] Viktor Tyagunenko, *Problems of Contemporary National Liberation Revolutions*, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1968, p. 48.

[27] *National Liberation Movements—Vital Problems*, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1965, p. 62.

[28] The sweeping characterisation of the decolonisation process as a more complete integration of the Third World into the imperialist sphere just does not square with reality. Whilst imperialism has found a new way in an attempt to continue its domination, it has been forced to do so from weakness rather than from strength and the new conditions in which it is forced to operate create problems for imperialism (more or less severe in different countries) which are not so easy to overcome. Despite continued pressures from neo-colonialism it would be utterly pedantic to argue that such pressures have made little difference to the possibilities of independent political expression by the newly liberated areas. Such a view ignores the part played by the socialist world in reinforcing the potential for meaningful anti-imperialist postures. Formulations which argue for the false decolonisation line appear in Franz Fanon, *The Damned*, Présence Africaine 1963, p. 141; Romano Ledda, *Social Classes and Political Struggle*, International Socialist Journal, August 1967, p.p. 561, 577; Arrighi and Saul, *Nationalism and Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa*, *The Socialist Register* 1969, p. 173.

[29] *National Liberation Movements—Vital Problems*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

[30] Iskenderov, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

[31] Iskenderov, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

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work of bourgeois democracy, which will, on the face of it, be erected if the political requisites laid down in the 81 Party statement are implemented? It is true that in the situation envisaged the existing or emergent bourgeoisie do not occupy the same dominant position which is typical of the classical capitalist state but the state is not worker-dominated either. The economy as a whole is still dependent on world capitalism and many of the economic measures prescribed (including the very important area of agrarian reform) will tend to generate capitalist forms and ideology. These economic measures—creating a national industry, state control of the basic development plans, state partnership with foreign or private capital, etc—do not in the absence of other factors, decide the issue. We must inevitably come back to the seminal question—the struggle for political power by the only social force capable of making a consistent phased advance towards socialism, the working people.

The Class Struggle

It is especially the question of the character of the class struggle in a national democratic type state which needs clarification and scientific substantiation.

Of the class struggle in these states it has been said:

> "But as for countries that have rejected capitalism or have not yet definitely decided which road to take, here the differentiation of social and political forces that invariably follows political independence is not necessarily accompanied by the aggravation of the class struggle. In such countries aggravation of the class struggle comes when any one class attempts to overstep its prerogatives, dominate the other forces and turn the national independence won by the united effort of the people to its own advantage. This can be prevented, however, by an alliance of all progressive forces.
>
> "On the other hand, of course, it is also possible that a local bourgeoisie, on getting on its feet economically, *might attempt* (my emphasis) with the aid of the state to establish its political dominance over the other classes and social groups and set the country on the capitalist road of development."[32]

Varga is even more explicit:

> "The well-to-do sections in the former colonies, including the bourgeoisie, do not experience the same fear of the transition to socialism often encountered among these layers in the old capitalist countries."[33]

There is no basis either in theory or in experience for such an expectation. Theoretical support for it is drawn from Lenin's reference to the possibility of compelling capitalists "to submit peacefully and to come over to socialism in a cultured and organised fashion provided they were paid well";[34] but this relates to a situation in which there was already a workers' dictatorship; and even then, as it turned out, the resistance of the bourgeoisie was both violent and fierce.

The 1969 document of the Communist and Workers' Parties directly noted a tendency towards a sharpened challenge in the newly independent countries by the national bourgeoisie "which are increasingly accepting a deal with imperialism", and remarked that "the pressing problems of social development of these states are the object not only of sharp struggle between the neo-colonialists and the peoples of these countries, but also of internal social conflicts".[35]

The United Democratic Front and the Working Class

The question arises whether, when dealing with some of the states which have a relatively progressive posture towards imperialism, we do not minimise or play down the class struggle by an undifferentiated encouragement of the sort of "alliances" in which independent workers' participation is either swamped or eliminated altogether. It is true that democratic alliances are necessary especially where the fundamental task facing a people is still the need to advance the national democratic revolution. But the 'united democratic front' has in almost all cases been expressed through a single party (where it has not been replaced by the army) which emerged during the pre-independence period (as in Ghana) or was created soon after (as in Egypt). It is generally in the control of the petty bourgeois elements with extraordinary powers vested in a single cult figure. The party is more often than not an instrument of the state rather than the reverse and effective workers or peasants participation is either minimal or non-existent. The Sudanese Communist Party in 1970 correctly rejected the idea of a one-party state in the existing Sudanese conditions: "In order that the alliance should stand on a firm basis the independence of the various components must be safeguarded."[36] The Algerian leader, Larbi Bouhali, equally stated: "We are convinced of the need for a broad and powerful anti-imperialist front, but this cannot be active and

[32] Iskenderov, *op. cit.*, p. 188-9.

[33] *Politico-Economic Problems of Capitalism*, Progress Publishers, 1968, pp. 98-99.

[34] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 339.

[35] Main document of 1969 meeting, Peace and Socialism Publishers, Prague 1969, p. 28. G. Mirsky has dealt with this tendency in a very useful analysis in *Kommunist* (S.U.) No. 17, 1968, 'The Nature of the Social Forces in Asia and Africa'. See also K. Brutens, *op. cit.*

[36] Quoted by Molefe Mini, *Class Struggle and African Unity*, *The African Communist*, No. 54, 1973.

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strong without a party equipped with the working class ideology. In any case, no 'front' can substitute for such a party."[37]

The unique example in the Sudan of an attempt to give independent expression within the 'front' to the working class, through its mass based Communist Party, ended in a temporary victory for those who resisted it. In practice the form which the front has taken in the independent African states makes it next to impossible for the working class to exercise any sort of independent role. Its advanced elements are not guided by a collective of their own, and tend to get lost and compromised in the state party or state apparatus, as happened in Egypt. Egypt's Communists dissolved their Party in a country which had a reasonably big working class and which today has nine million industrial and urban workers.[38] The proportion is bigger than in either the Soviet Union or China at the time of their revolutions. Amongst the reasons given for this step was that it was necessary to lay the foundations of unity among the broad social forces on which the Party depends, "and that the political organisation which is called for at this stage is not the Communist Party".[39] . . . Since then its cadres have been in and out of office and in and out of Egypt's jails with almost equal frequency.

Whatever the position may have been in 1969 when the Parties declared that "in a number of states the social role and political activity of the working class have increased . . . (and) Communists are intensifying their activity amongst the peasant masses and are carrying proletarian ideology into their midst", in the Africa of today the picture is less happy. Of the Communist and Workers' Parties who have taken part in the last few conferences of the International Communist Movement, there is not a single one which enjoys legality, and in almost every case its leaders and members experience repression and persecution. In those states which have been variously described as socialist orientated or revolutionary democratic (and Ghana is an example of this) the tendency towards bureaucracy and towards blurring the borderline between party and state has the effect of severely limiting independent participation by the working people.

Even in regard to the trade unions, which in the colonial period made a significant independent contribution to the struggle for liberation, the tendency has been towards institutionalising them, subordinating them to the ruling regime and weakening their independent role as social organisations or as instruments of the class struggle. The trade union laws of Tanzania fall into this category.[40] In Ghana too the 1958 Industrial Relations Act made all the trade unions subordinate to the Trade Union Council which was in turn subordinated to the state and the CPP.

The role of the national bourgeoisie (whether incipient or well-developed) also needs a more refined scrutiny. We hop too easily from correct statements that the special character of the non-comprador national bourgeoisie sometimes makes possible at least temporary alliances in relation to the continued threat of imperialist domination, to the inference that this bourgeoisie, unlike anything history has yet seen, is prepared to collaborate in its own destruction as a class. Thus a recent exponent of the theory of the non-capitalist path has said of India that the 'non-monopoly national bourgeoisie' has the objective interest of unity with the working class and non-exploiting peasantry to take the non-capitalist path.[41] And the same writer attributed Nkrumah's downfall to the fact that the commencement of non-capitalist development "was precipitating a class conflict"—not, let me emphasise, between the working class and the bourgeoisie but "within the bourgeoisie between its national and comprador elements",—almost as if the national bourgeoisie were the chief defender of the non-capitalist path to socialism.[42] Indeed, a recent study has made out a convincing case that in Ghana Nkrumah's attempt to discourage the growth of an indigenous capitalist class led him to prefer partnership between foreign private investment and the Ghana state, which alienated the small non-comprador capitalists and no doubt added to the relative ease with which the regime was destroyed.[43]

What has been said in relation to the role of classes goes to the very root of the problem of the national democratic state, even as a transitional tool for the advance towards socialist forms. The 1960 document rightly featured the need in the post-independence state to create conditions in which progressive social forces would be able to develop and assert themselves. This was obviously the

[37] *Ibid*, p. 33.

[38] H. Rashid, *Egypt's Workers Fight for Freedom*, *The African Communist*, No. 44, 1971, p. 37.

[39] Molefe Mini, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[40] Trades Disputes (Settlement) Act, No. 43 of 1962 which made strikes virtually impossible and the National Union of Tanganyika (NUTA) (establishment) Act, No. 18 of 1964 which put the Trade Union Movement under government control. This aspect and the more recent creation of workers committees is more fully analysed by Issa G. Shivji, *op. cit.* and H. Mapolu, *The Organisation and Participation of Workers in Tanzania*, E.R.B., paper 721.

[41] Albert Tshume, *Africa's Revolutionary Way Forward*, *The African Communist*, No. 51, 1972, p. 107.

[42] Albert Tshume, *The Non-Capitalist Path in Africa*, *The African Communist* No. 52, 1973, p. 55.

[43] Judith Marshall, *The Political Economy of Dependence*, Ghana, 1945-66. Thesis for the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands, August 1972.

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reason for emphasis on the need to reject dictatorial and despotic systems of government, to ensure democratic rights and freedoms, including the right to form political parties and social organisations which would participate effectively in shaping government policy.

The tendencies have been in the direction of dictatorial and despotic methods of government, with the military playing the dominant role in a good proportion of African countries including some which claim a socialist orientation. Outside the very limited official framework, the right of people to work for social change and to participate in shaping government policy is minimal.

This raises two questions: firstly, in the past decade, a number of countries have been described as national democratic states although there has, in fact, not been a single one in Africa which embraced all the main features set out in the 1960 Document. Has not the concept, therefore, been drained of some of its meaning by allowing one fundamental aspect—a progressive, anti-imperialist policy—to overshadow the others and in particular the equally important aspect of internal political rights for the working people? And secondly, is it in any case, theoretically legitimate to talk of states as tools or instruments for the transition to socialism, when within these states the working class has neither an effective foothold within the state apparatus nor the legal rights to organise itself as an independent political force.

State Autonomy

What adds to our difficulty in trying to place the concepts of national democratic state and non-capitalist path (when they are linked together) within the framework of the Marxist theory of social development is the fact that there seems little, if any, connection between the 'choice of a road' and the character of the socio-economic forces at the time of the choice. The choice is made from 'above' and there appear to be no identifiable differences in the socio-economic bases of these countries which *declare* for one path or another. As Dr. V. G. Solodovnikov stated: "It is in politics and ideology that there are differences of principle among African countries", and the "differences between these countries at present involved not the basis, which is for the time being of one and the same type, but the superstructure, the political and ideological orientation".[44]

The idea of relative state autonomy is no stranger to Marxism:

> "The independence of the state is only found nowadays in those countries where the estates have not yet completely developed into classes, where the estates, done away with in more advanced countries, still have a part to play, and where there exists a mixture; countries that is to say in which no one section of the population can achieve dominance over the others."[45]

Large areas of Africa began their independent existence in this condition. The special role of the state as a branch of the social division of labour in the African experience needs greater elaboration. Perhaps in this area, more than most, theoretical generalisations are limited by the paucity of detailed Marxist research, analysis and comparative study of the form and content of the developing post-independence state structures in the various parts of Africa. The concept of relative state autonomy as dealt with by Marx and Engels related to the Bonapartist type state before the imperialist era[46] and the autarchic type administrations of the societies which passed through the Asiatic mode of production.[47]

In the case of Africa there is no relatively closed economic system and, at important levels, both the structure and the superstructure constitute links in a chain of international economic and political relations. To the degree that, at the time of independence, no one section of the population could have achieved dominance over the other, scope existed for opposite subjective choices in countries with broadly similar socio-economic structures. But the problems surrounding the *implementation* of the choice takes us beyond the politics and ideology of the group which inherited the apparatus on Independence Day.

The conflicting interests (including external ones) in the developing socio-economic structure, however difficult they might sometimes be to locate, begin to reflect themselves in the state apparatus. In addition to its administrative role it often becomes a vehicle for the creation of a new privileged social community for whom "the aim of the state becomes (their) private aim, in the form of a race for higher posts, of careerism"[48] and who, given half a chance, use the state apparatus to launch themselves or their nominees into business.

It is no doubt true that individual charismatic political leaders (like Nkrumah on the one side or Kenyatta on the other) or a popular army man (like Siad Barre) can become the most important factor in determining the proclaimed direction or the main

[44] *Marxism Today*, September 1969, p. 280.

[45] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, International Publishers, p. 59.

[46] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx-Engels *Selected Works* (in one volume), pp. 169-171. Also *The Civil War in France*, p. 290.

[47] Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, International Publishers, pp. 69-70.

[48] Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (in Early Texts (ed.) David McLellan, Basil Blackwell), p. 69.

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"mission" of the state. But more often than not one superstructural 'accident' is negatived by an opposite superstructural 'accident'. Ghana is an example of this. I make no special point whatsoever of the fact that Nkrumah was ousted—a defeat for progressive forces whether in Africa or Chile is not in itself proof of the viability or lack of viability of the chosen path. But what is important in relation to our discussion is the fact that in Ghana the masses made hardly a response to a sudden change from a supposedly non-capitalist path to its opposite. What is more, all the main constituents of the state superstructure continued to serve the new group of leaders with almost equal verve and some of them indeed welcomed the change.

If we believe that the reason for this was that the CPP was dominated by a petty bourgeois state bureaucracy and not by the working people or that the state institutions were not sufficiently rooted in workers' and peasants' power, or that many of the economic measures were precipitating class conflict which threatened the existence of a state not sufficiently prepared to defend itself, then we must perhaps ask not only what went wrong in Ghana but also what was wrong with our characterisation of Ghana as a national democratic state which had begun to take a non-capitalist path towards socialism. Was Ghana ever near to being a democratic dictatorship of the 'revolutionary bloc of the proletariat, peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie'? Were the economic measures, regarded objectively, 'non-capitalist' in their essence or were they objectively reinforcing dependency on the world capitalist system?

The national democratic state is too often dealt with in a way which suggests that in Africa it is possible not only to by-pass Capitalism but also to by-pass the class struggle as ordinarily understood in Marxism. In the last resort the State is an instrument and not a regulator of class struggle. Its role as a mediator between contending classes may, at any given moment, have a more or less autonomous character depending upon the special circumstances in which it emerged and operates. But at the end of the day it objectively reflects a class position. Whether it becomes the instrument of this or that class is the result of struggle not merely within the state apparatus but more so within society as a whole. Alliances of "progressive forces" will not prevent any class from "overstepping its prerogative", nor is it conceivable that a local bourgeoisie will not do all in its power to set a country on the Capitalist road of development.

In Africa the class struggle continues and will become more intense as social contradictions grow. The contradictions cannot be absorbed by an administration which may temporarily reflect a balance of power. It is harmful and misleading to over-emphasise the potential for change from above (what "cleaner" method is there than the coup?) and to project the post-independence hybrid state form as having the mission and the capacity to take a country through ordered stages to socialism. Such an approach encourages the African revolutionary to substitute conspiracy at the top for mass organisation down below. It disarms him and the class he represents by reinforcing the illusion that it can all be left to the leaders operating through a state bureaucracy.

Conclusion

(1) The Leninist theoretical concept that it is possible for countries without an adequate socio-economic base to by-pass capitalism assumes the existence of a specific combination of external and internal factors, amongst which the most important are:

(a) the emergence of a state form in which *real power rests in the working people*, whether it be a dictatorship of the proletariat or a revolutionary dictatorship of workers and peasants, or some other form suitably adapted to local conditions;
(b) the existence of a socialist sector in the world which is materially advanced enough and in a position to 'come to their aid with all means at their disposal'. For contemporary Africa this must mean that a combination of internal power and socialist aid would enable such countries to break imperialism's political and economic grip and to eliminate their overwhelming dependence on the world capitalist market and the world capitalist economy.[49]

(2) None of these factors has, so far, been present in a sufficient measure. Particularly;

(a) there has never been nor is there now a single state in Africa in which real power rests in the working people.
(b) the economies of all the newly-independent states have remained within the sphere of operation of the objective economic laws of the world capitalist economy,[50] and the post-independence aim of building a balanced national economy has to a greater or lesser

[49] Nkrumah showed an awareness of the limitations of the concept of self-reliance when he addressed the opening conference of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU): "No independent African state by itself has a chance to follow an independent course of economic development. Many of us who have tried to do this have been almost ruined or have had to return to the fold of the former colonial rulers. . . ." Quoted by Molefi Mini, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18. His solution—a united Africa which could establish its own giant industrial complexes—was politically unreal as an immediate perspective.

[50] Tyagunenko, *Socialism, Theory and Practice*, Sept., 1973, pp. 123.

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degree been pursued by a resort to imperialist aid in a form and on a scale which increases rather than diminishes dependence on Western capitalism.[51]

(c) It is a self-defeating proposition to describe, as has been done, a country whose economy is by and large dependent on the laws of the world capitalist system, as taking the non-capitalist (or any other) path to socialism.

(3) The emergence of independent states in post-war Africa constitutes an important advance in the anti-colonial revolution. They have become a positive force in the world's struggle against imperialism and in this struggle they can and have, on balance, played a significantly progressive role. Internally, in many of the more progressive states positive achievements can be chalked up in the direction of constructing the beginning of a national economy, despite the fact that the attempts have been hampered by factors already mentioned.

(4) The relative progressive character of these states does not, however, detract from the fact that the concepts of the non-capitalist path and the national democratic state (especially when linked together) have proved to be extremely elusive and unwieldy as theoretical propositions either to describe existing structures or as a guide to Marxist revolutionary groups or individuals in the continent of Africa. More particularly, the projection of this state form as something which becomes a regulator rather than an instrument of class struggle, and which is considered to have the potential within it of taking a country through ordered stages to socialism, has negative implications.

In practice, as we have experienced in Africa, even in those states which have opted for socialism as an ultimate goal, existing and incipient independent expressions of Marxist revolutionary parties have been stifled or lost in the front or the state bureaucracy. Similarly, the spread of socialist ideas is usually restricted to an "official" theory which is often committed to the untenable view that the social homogeneity of African society stemming from communal traditions diminishes the importance of class struggle as a motive force for social change in Africa.[52]

(5) There is no convincing reason to believe that the emerging national bourgeoisie in Africa will commit suicide as a class or that it will collaborate in creating conditions for its elimination as a class 'in the national interest'. This does not, of course, mean that there can be no basis for forming alliances with those sections of the national bourgeoisie who, whether motivated by the national interest or by a desire to line their pockets, are in given conditions prepared to play a positive role against foreign political and economic domination. But unless we plan for accidents we can have no expectation that a state in which power is shared with this class will be able to steer the country towards socialism.

(6) In Africa the antithesis between bourgeois and proletarian revolution is not the only one that exists. There are many states in which the possibility of achieving workers' power is still some distance away, and at the same time the superstructure is not dominated by the local bourgeoisie, because (like the proletariat) it is insufficiently developed as an economic class to exercise exclusive power. This gives the state apparatus a relatively autonomous character. In such a situation it is obvious that the state apparatus can itself become a significant factor in taking the anti-feudal, anti-colonial revolution a stage further. It can be pressured into pursuing development strategies and implementing social policies which resist neo-colonial plans, favour the working people and facilitate their struggle for immediate rights and for their eventual assumption of power.

The degree to which such a state (whatever name we give it) facilitates or obstructs not its own mission but that of the working class to abolish exploitation, is not so much determined by action from 'above' but by the eventual outcome of the social conflict from below. And it is only when this conflict is resolved in favour of the working people that a new state will have been won in the struggle. Such a state based on workers' and peasants' power will have the capacity to move towards a socialist order, whatever transitional economic and social strategies the specific conditions would then demand. As yet no such state has been won in Africa.

There can be no all-embracing recipe for winning it. But the attempt to do it from above, to transform society by an army or by edict usually places those attempting it (however genuine and committed they are to the cause of real socialism) in an unsolvable dilemma:

> "The worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class which he represents, and for the realising of the measures which that domination implies."[53]

(7) The struggle for socialism in Africa needs a revolutionary party based on Marxism-Leninism and with real roots among the working people. Such a force cannot be conjured up out of the air. Each country constitutes a special situation which can

[51] In relation to Ghana see Marshall, *op. cit.*

[52] This point is well made by P. Manchka, *Africa on the New Road*, Novosti Press, Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1972. pp. 72-3.

[53] Engels, *The Peasant was in Germany*, Progress Publishers, p. 138.

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only be built upon by indigenous radicals, not in terms of some mechanical formula but based on local realities. I am not arguing for some schematic call for the formation of bodies calling themselves communist parties but whose claim to a vanguard role may have no more than verbal significance. The strength and size of the proletariat is one obviously relevant factor. Another may be whether potential exists to transform an existing official party, which is programmatically dedicated to move towards socialism, into a force which draws its strength from the working people not merely in rhetoric but in fact.

But whatever practical approach a local situation calls for, revolutionaries cannot but base themselves on the premise that without such an instrument there can be no successful road to socialism. Any policy which frustrates its growth or which results in alliances which demand the elimination of independent working class expression (actual or potential) is, together with the other factors mentioned, a sure recipe for taking Africa along the road to capitalism.

Class Consciousness and the British Working Class

Changes in the Mode of Production and the Growth of 'Mass Militancy' in the British Mining Industry

Ian Rutledge

(*The author, previously lecturer in Sociology at the University of London, is now a miner at Kellingley Colliery, Yorks.*)

Introduction

In the 1960s it was a common practice among bourgeois sociologists to distinguish between the new "affluent" working class (e.g. prosperous Midlands car workers) and the so-called "traditional" working class of which miners were usually held to be the best example. Whereas the latter exemplified the qualities of militancy and class consciousness the former were presented as being essentially individualistic, home-centered and non-militant. This general viewpoint also had an important predictive aspect. One of the main factors which was believed to be responsible for the class-consciousness (and political consciousness) of the "traditional" working class was that miners, shipyard workers, dockers etc. lived cheek by jowl in well-defined close-knit communities which were often relatively isolated from the rest of society. Since this type of working class community was recognised as being on the decline since the end of the last war it was believed that this foreshadowed a general reduction of class conflict in Britain, a diminution of socialist ideas among the working people and the achievement of a consensus-based "Neo-capitalism".[1]

[1] Other factors were also referred to in arguing the decline of class and class consciousness although with respect to these there was more disagreement among bourgeois sociologists.

In this short article I do not intend to waste space in criticising the foolishness of bourgeois sociology. Others more qualified than I have gone over this ground in considerable detail. Suffice it to say that the idea of an "affluent" working class which has no quarrel with the capitalist system has been consigned to the scrapheap by the historical reality of the past five years.

However there is one particular aspect of the bourgeois viewpoint briefly described above, which does concern me. For if the sociologists of the mid 1960s saw the car-worker as the "new man" of affluent Neo-capitalism, they certainly also viewed the militant miner as a kind of industrial dinosaur—a relic of a bygone age of class conflict who was fast on the road to extinction. That they were somewhat premature in saying good riddance to this troublesome creature hardly needs saying. In the last few years the British miner has risen like a phoenix from the ashes of those destroyed mining communities, to challenge once again the rulers of an unjust and unequal social order.

Communists will be well aware of many of the factors which have again placed the British miner in the front line of the struggle against Capitalism. The growth of the Broad Left within the Leadership of the NUM, the miners' realisation of their relative decline in wages, the rigidity of Tory wages policy,

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the decision of the State to halt the decline of the coal industry—all these factors are well known. However it must be said that factors such as these operate primarily at the level of the social superstructure. To say this is by no means to minimise their importance, but it does suggest the need to set such factors against a background which also takes into consideration fundamental changes in the mode of production of the mining industry, and especially changes in the social relations of production.

Production Relations in Mining c. 1954

One of the best accounts of mining life about this time (c. 1954) is to be found in *Coal is our Life* by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter.[2] The book is a detailed socio-anthropological study of a Yorkshire mining community which adopts a fundamentally Marxist perspective. Chapter II of the book describes the different forms in which the NCB, (a State capitalist corporation) appropriated surplus value at this time. While surface workers and underground haulage and maintenance workers sold their labour power on a day-wage basis (as is the case today), face workers and development workers sold their labour power on a piece-rate basis which was known as contract work. Indeed, in 1953 53 per cent of all underground workers in the British mining industry were on contract work.

The system of contract work was marked by a considerable degree of on-the-spot bargaining between miners and management. For example, if a particular development work had to be speeded up, a special bargain might be struck with the respective development workers. The miners would quote a price to the management, naturally adding on a margin for bargaining power ("so as we could come down a bit if needs be", as one ex-development man explained to me). Then if a satisfactory price was agreed the job would go ahead.

An important consequence of this type of production relations was a kind of "miniaturisation" of the class struggle. Industrial disputes were common but they were exceptionally small scale affairs. Occasionally a whole region might engage in industrial action—as in the case of the successful 1955 stoppage of 100,000 Yorkshire miners, for a revision in piecework rates—but this scale of action was the exception not the rule. Indeed strikes could, and often did, involve certain sections of contract workers in isolation from the rest, and a proliferation of different types of contract work (there were machine-men, drawers-off, colliers, rippers, panners) resulted in differing degrees of militancy and solidarity among the mining labour force. For example, Dennis and his associates draw the following comparison between colliers and back-rippers.

> Men working in large teams, such as the colliers, whose conditions vary over short periods and whose wages are, therefore, not by any means a certainty, tend to show great solidarity vis-a-vis the management. . . . However the more independent pairs of men who have "back-ripping" contracts, in conditions which alter very little from day to day, tend to set more store by maintaining good relations with the management and undermanager. In a remarkable number of cases men on such jobs as these have the reputation of being "bosses' men".[3]

Exactly how true this particular comparison is, I cannot say,[4] but what can be said is that strikes and other industrial disputes in mining at this time were typically small-scale unofficial affairs in which solidarity action was frequently limited to contract workers of the same category. A miner at my own pit summed the situation up like this. "There used to be a lot of disunity. You'd get the rippers all coming out one day—but the colliers would be carrying on working. The next day the colliers might all come out, but the rippers would remain at work."

With regard to actual wage levels the British miner at this time, was still earning more than the average industrial wage. However there was a marked, and growing discrepancy between the wages earned by contract workers and those received by day-wage workers both underground and on the surface. Of course, facemen and development workers had a right to the highest mining wages, but the gap between contract money and the day-wage was in danger of becoming too extreme. The basic reason for this was that whereas the contract workers could exploit a "plant-bargaining" situation to jack-up their wages, the day-wage men (haulage workers, banksmen, maintenance men etc.) had to be satisfied with wages which were negotiated through the national machinery in conditions which, for a variety of reasons, were not conducive to obtaining the best wages. Thus the system of production relations in the mining industry at this time resulted not only in a fragmentation of wage-bargaining (and industrial action) among the contract workers, but also a major division of interests between the contract workers as a whole and the day-wage workers.

Production Relations in Mining 1965-1971

In the past 30 years a major transformation has taken place in the British mining industry. As is well known, from about 1956 onwards successive

[2] N. Dennis, F. Henriques and C. Slaughter, *Coal is our Life*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1956.

[3] Dennis et al. *op. cit.* pp. 48-49.

[4] Actually Dennis and his associates may be regarded as a very reliable source of information in view of the fact that one of the team had the experience of being a working miner.

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Governments decided to progressively eliminate the British coal industry in favour of imported oil. However the policy of massive pit closures (some of the results of which will I discuss a little later) was also accompanied by an equally important transformation in mining technology. *Coal is our Life* was written at a time when pit mechanisation was in its infancy. Both ripping and coal getting were still essentially pick and shovel jobs and the haulage system was still based on pit ponies.

By about 1965 mechanisation had made considerable progress, especially in the Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Midlands coalfields. Powerful shearing machinery and armoured "Panzer" belt lines together with mobile roof supports (chocks) and tracked road-heading machines were revolutionising the processes of coal getting and development. Similar advances were being made in the field of haulage with the disappearance of the pit pony and the introduction of the monorail haulage system together with the diesel, and later the electric mine loco.

This process of mining mechanisation was occurring at a time when the left in the National Union of Mineworkers was pushing for the abolition of piece-work and the introduction of a national day-wage system of payment for facemen and development workers. The Communist Party argued in a 1965 pamphlet that

> There should be a national power loading agreement, based on an adequate day-wage, without method study, and on remotely controlled longwall faces. In such an agreement the same rate of wages must apply in whatever coalfield these units are operating. If these two demands were carried through they would pave the way for ending the piece work system in the industry.[5]

There can be little doubt that for reasons of its own the NCB also desired the abolition of contract work and the introduction of a day-wage system for faceworkers. The Board believed that such a change would help to eliminate industrial disputes and would also prevent certain sections of contract workers pushing up their wages to the detriment of the Coal Board profits. There was however, another reason which was perhaps more significant. To a large extent, the introduction of the sort of new machinery mentioned above demanded a major rationalisation of wages policy. The new mode of production in the mining industry demanded a much greater degree of co-operation and interdependence among the workforce, and the disruption inherent in the old system of contract work could no longer be tolerated. The heavy investment involved in the mechanisation policy could not be jeopardised by the sort of frequent small-scale stoppages characteristic of the old wages system.

Consequently, in 1965 the National Power Loading Agreement was introduced which made proviso for the eventual equalisation of faceworkers' wages throughout the country, and involved the progressive elimination of contract work and its replacement by a day-wage system of payment. However the equalisation of wage rates was to be a fairly slow process. As late as 1968 the power loading rate varied between a maximum of £26 6s 6d in the Nottinghamshire area, and a minimum of £23 1s 0d in Scotland, Durham, North Wales, South Wales and Cumberland.[6] It was not until 1971 that full equalisation was achieved.

Consequences of Changes in Production Relations 1972-1974

It is certainly true that many faceworkers soon came to bitterly regret the introduction of the National Power Loading Agreement. For some miners, especially development workers, the agreement actually entailed a lowering of wages. For example, an ex-development man at my own pit tells me that in 1958 he was earning £40 per week compared with the NPLA rate of £36.79 in 1974. Another factor which annoyed many experienced faceworkers was that under the National Power Loading Agreement job direction and control was officially transfered to the under-officials. At the same time the number of under-officials to a district was progressively increased.[7] Dave Douglass has amply expressed the miners' frustration with excessive supervision in his book on Durham mining life.

> The new face systems push more and more officials onto our backs. Where once a face would have a single deputy and a district (comprising a group of faces) had one overman, we now have three deputies and an overman to a face, plus an under manager for each district. An absurd situation.[8]

Douglass also complains about the loss of "plant bargaining" entailed by the new mode of production.

> Today the policy of the Coal Board is aimed at a standardisation of wages, the elimination of extras

[5] *A Future for the Miners*, Communist Party Publication, 1965.

[6] Figures taken from Lawrence Daly, *The Miners and the Nation*, NUM Scottish Area, 1968, p. 14.

[7] The relative absence of supervision under the previous contract labour system was recognised by Marx as an important characteristic of all piece-work. "Since the quality and intensity of the work are here controlled by the form of the wage itself, superintendence of labour becomes in great part superfluous." (Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, Lawrence & Wishart, London 1970, p. 553.)

[8] Dave Douglass, *Pit Life in Co. Durham*, Ruskin Coll. Oxford 1972, p. 1.

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> and the elimination of bargaining at the face. Under the national day wages systems, dreamed up by the national officials of the NUM and the NCB all negotiations on wages are supposed to be national and day wages instead of piece rates now apply. The branch is supposed to be left with little more than compensation cases for injured workmen.[9]

It would seem that Douglass's Trotskyite leanings lead him to idealise about a "golden age" of "workers control" in the mining industry which he sees as regretably disappearing. In sharp contrast Communists in the mining industry recognised with great foresight that the introduction of the National Power Loading Agreement would have a major impact upon the role and function of the NUM. My own branch secretary, Jimmy Miller of Kellingley Colliery (Yorkshire) recently explained to me the long-term reasoning which lay behind the Party's original campaign for the abolition of contract labour. Whereas Douglass apparently regrets that wages negotiation is now restricted to a national level it was precisely this aspect to which the Communists attached great importance. The Party recognised that in raising all wages negotiation to the national level one of the main factors inhibiting the common action and unity of facemen and the lower-paid day-wage men would be removed. Now the facemen would be in the same boat as the outbye workers, both having to win wage increases at the national level. However it was also recognised that the new wages system for faceworkers would sooner or later result in the redirection of their militancy away from the individual face, district or pit level, and towards the sphere of national bargaining. Inevitably this would result in considerable pressure being brought to bear on the NUM leadership, and with increasing rank and file pressure for firm action on pay, the role of the Left in the NUM would be considerably strengthened.

As we now know these expectations have been borne out to the letter. The reawakening of the Mineworkers Union began, through unofficial action, in the Yorkshire coalfield in 1969 and 1970. In 1972 this was followed by a national strike, the first since 1926, which won the miners considerable wage increases at the same time as it shook the foundations of the Tory Government. Finally in 1974 the *coup de grace* was administered: an overtime ban and national strike resulted in the downfall of the Tory Government and further substantial wage increases. The new and victorious spirit of the British miners finds its expression in the song of Nottinghamshire miners marching through Mansfield following the Tories' electoral defeat.

> We sank his yacht
> we sank his yacht,
> Ee ay addio,
> we sank his yacht!

In conclusion, it could be said that changes in the mode of production and the production relations of the British mining industry over the past 15 years or so have provided the basis upon which it has been possible to build a militant mass struggle which has brought considerable benefits to the miners themselves and a new feeling of confidence in the whole working class movement. Many miners did not realise what would be the consequences of the changes I have discussed. Certainly the NCB had no idea what would follow from their plans for modernisation and rationalisation. Only the Communists clearly recognised the historical necessity of the changes which have taken place in mining, and the role which they would play in creating the necessary conditions for militant union policies.[10]

Mechanisation and the associated changes in the wages system brought to an end the somewhat elite position of the faceworker with respect to wage bargaining and created the basis for a united struggle of all mineworkers. Until 1972 the "militancy" of the miners had been a localised and somewhat divisive militancy in which different categories of mineworker, different pits, different regions, had fought unilaterally for better pay and conditions. From 1972 onwards the militancy of the miners has been *mass militancy*.

[9] *Ibid.* p. 31.

[10] Of course this statement does not refer to the general policy of running-down the industry through pit closures, which the Communist Party fought against consistently.

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Some Remarks on Pit Closures and Miners' Migrations

What follows is merely by way of a few tentative suggestions about the effects of pit closures and miners' migrations with reference to the growth of mass militancy. At the beginning of this essay I mentioned that it was one of the general assumptions of bourgeois sociology that the gradual disappearance of the "traditional" working class community (e.g. mining villages) would contribute to a general decline of class consciousness and class conflict in the society.

Between 1947 and 1972 the number of pits in Britain fell by about 75 per cent. Hundreds of thriving mining communities were practically eliminated overnight. Both Tory and Labour Governments were responsible for this economic and human disaster.

But bourgeois predictions that the destruction of these closely-knit, proletarian communities would result in a corresponding weakening of class consciousness and militancy have clearly been wide of the mark as far as the miners are concerned. Reasons have already been given to account for the growth of mass militancy among the miners in the last few years, but it may well also be that some of the generally accepted assumptions about the relationship between community structure and class consciousness are largely ill-founded.

It is true historically, certain mining villages, especially in Scotland and Durham, developed a remarkable degree of class consciousness and political awareness. Dave Douglass gives an extremely interesting account of the Durham "Red Villages" in the 1920s and 1930s.[11] However it must be said that with a few exceptions these were unique experiences which in no sense could be said to be typical of mining communities as a whole. It could well be argued that in many respects, the traditional mining village displayed a certain narrow parochialism inconsistent with the development of real class and political consciousness and at the same time, through its geographical and social isolation, impeded the close contact and solidarity with other groups of workers which has been a major aspect of the recent miners' struggles. This point has already been raised and discussed by J. H. Westergaard in an important critique of the bourgeois theory of the "withering away" of class. It is worth quoting from Westergaard at some length on this question.

> (There is) an assumption that the kind of working class unity which finds expression in industrial, or more especially in political, action draws its nourishment from the simpler and more intimate loyalties of neighbourhood and kin. Consequently, it is postulated, as the latter are weakened so the former declines. The assumption is highly questionable. For it implies that the solidarity of class—which is societal in its sweep, and draws no nice distinctions between men of this place and that, this name and that, this dialect and that—is rooted in the kind of parochial solidarity which is its very antithesis. To doubt the implied identity between the two antitheses is not to deny that sectional loyalties of region and occupation have contributed in the past to the formation of wider loyalties of class; but the performance of that contribution has depended upon a trancendence of the original narrow basis of solidarity.[12]

The pit closures of the past 30 years resulted in many forced migrations of miners and their families to other coalfields. In particular many Scottish and Durham miners moved south to the Yorkshire coalfield. At my own pit, Kellingley (Yorks.) about half the labour force are migrants from Scotland and Durham. Inevitably these miners' migrations have served to break down the differences and traditional antagonisms between one mining region and another. The migrants have brought with them different forms of expression, different attitudes, different Union practices and different forms of industrial action. I would argue that such factors have had an important impact upon the miner's consciousness. They have caused the pitman to think of himself increasingly as a *British* miner rather than as a man whose loyalties lie principally with this or that particular mining region.

If this argument is correct, then the miners' migrations have also contributed to the growth of mass militancy, along with the changes in production relations, whose role has been discussed above.

[11] Douglass, *op. cit.* pp. 66-80.

[12] J. H. Westergaard, "The withering away of class—a contempory myth", in *Towards Socialism* (ed. P. Anderson & R. Blackburn), Fontana Library, 1965, p. 107.

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